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KAMBA RĀMĀYANAM

an English prose rendering

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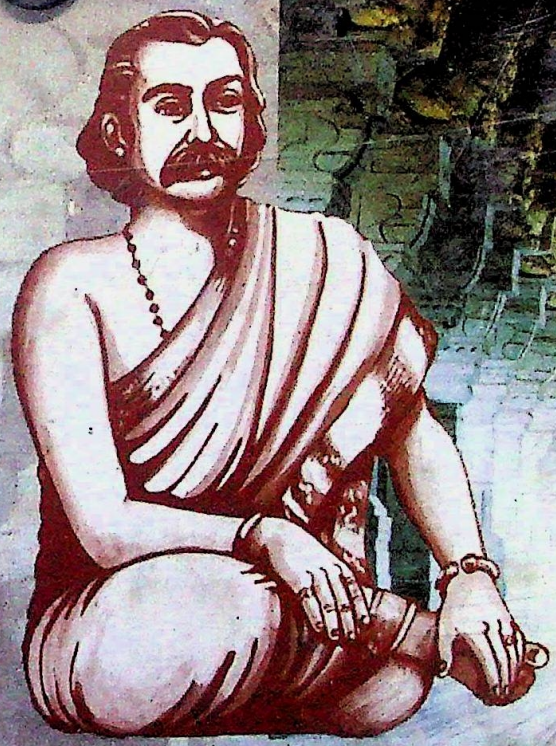

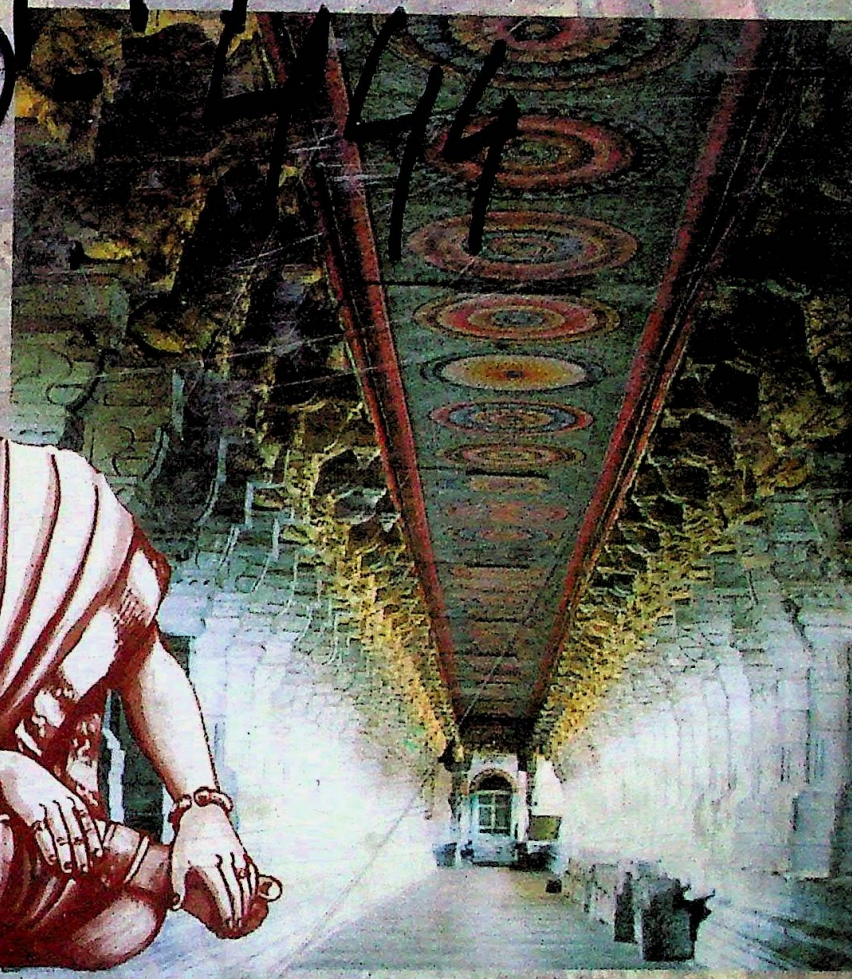

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan

DR H V HANDE

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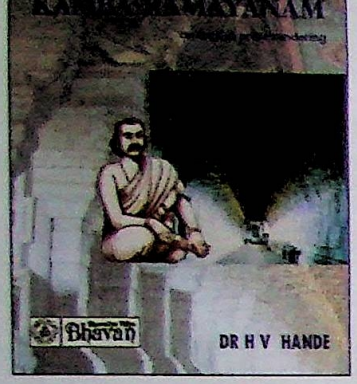

The *Rāmāyana* is not a mere 'story' nor is it a mere 'epic poem'. Sri Rāma is both God and man.

As Mahāyogi Sri Aurobindo has declared, "The *Rāmāyana* is at once history, legend and a poem unmatchably sublime, supremely artistic and magnificently dramatic."

Vālmeeki, the ādikavi, has inspired the poets of this sacred land to retell Rāma's glorious life in their respective tongues. **Kavicakravarti Kamban's** *Rāmāvatāram*, Rāma's story in six books, is both a landmark in the history of Tamil literature and an exemplary literary masterpiece. There are few lovers of Tamil who have not been entranced by its beauty of expression, richness of imagery and ethical grandeur. Shri V V S Iyer, the great revolutionary patriot, would claim for Kamban's *Rāmāvatāram* an 'individuality' distinct from Vālmeeki's. He confidently asserts that Kamban's *Rāmāvatāram* will stand favourable comparison with the *Mahābhārata,* too. He also avers that it excels Homer's celebrated *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Dr H V Hande, by providing us with this superb English prose rendering of Kamban's Tamil classic, has done the nation a great service.

- S. Ramakrishnan

Cover: A partial view of the thousand-pillar-mandapam of Holy Rameswaram
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KAMBA RĀMĀYANAM

— an English prose rendering

Dr H V HANDE

09/67

1996

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BLESSINGS

BY

JAGADGURU SRI SANKARĀCĀRYA SWĀMIGAL OF KANCHI

The RĀMĀYANA and the MAHĀBHĀRATA are two of the world's greatest epics. The protagonists in both exemplify the code of conduct that people must endeavour to follow. Though both epics were composed in Sanskrit, they have been translated into almost all the regional languages of our country, and also into several foreign languages.

Kamban, the emperor of poets, hailing from Therazhundur of Thanjavur district, brought the Rāmāyana to the people of Tamil Nādu in Tamil verse, enabling everyone to understand it.

Dr H Venkataramana Hande has now rendered Kamban s work into English prose, to make it accessible to people all over the world and to arouse their interest in the epic. We are happy that the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, which has published several good books, has come forward to publish this one, too.

May the writer of this book as well as those who read it, receive the grace of Lord Rāma.

Nārāyanasmriti.

(TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL TAMIL)

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Salutations and adorations to *Ādikavi* Vālmeeki, *Kavicakravarti* Kamban (9th century), *Sant Sāhitya Shiropatra* Tulasidas (16th century) and the grand, endless procession of poet-saints of Mother India!

"*Dharma (Aram)* leads to well-being here and hereafter," declared an ancient sage. This for the individual. When it comes to a nation, too, it is *dharma* that holds it together. No one can deny that for both, individual and national welfare, people at all levels should adhere to *dharma* or right conduct, a concept which springs from the very *Védas.* However, our compassionate sages realised that *dharma,* as propounded in the *Védas,* was too abstruse for laymen to comprehend and practise. So they created works in which the main characters exemplified *dharma.* Sage Vālmeeki's epic poem, *Rāmāyana,* is one such great work. Presented in a delectable literary form, his Sanskrit epic of 24,000 verses is a practical guide to *dharma.* It also delineates the consequences of following *dharma,* and of transgressing it. Hence reading it and listening to discourses on it, are a means to learning the lessons of right conduct. More than any law — there is a well-known saying that we cannot legislate a people into morality — it is this epic that has shaped the ethos of a large majority of Indians. *Therefore any effort to revive the study of the epic, is a positive measure towards strengthening the moral fibre of the nation. For this important reason Dr H V Hande's English prose rendering of Kamban's Rāmāyanam for those who do not know Tamil, deserves all praise.*

Sage Vālmeeki, in his quest for the ideal protagonist, goes to the omniscient sage, Nārada. Nārada gives him a short account of the story of Rāma. The hero has to be human; or else of what use will the standards he sets for himself be to the common man? Rāma himself says in the *Rāmāyana,* "I consider myself to be a human being." Vālmeeki performs the miracle of casting the Infinite in the role of the finite, of squeezing

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the Timeless into the time-frame. Rāma, the hero of the epic, is an incarnation of God, but he remains human at all times. He weeps, he worries, is often bewildered. Thus, suffering sorrowing man finds it easy to identify with him.

It was compassion that brought Rāma down to earth and therefore his story, *Rāmāyana*, too, had to sprout from the seed of compassion. How did this happen? Soon after hearing Nārada's story of Rāma in brief, Vālmeeki finds a lovely spot to bathe in, the sparkling waters of the Tamasā River. With Rāma's character in mind, he tells his disciple, "Look, revered Bharadwāja, the water is as limpid as a good man's mind." Even as the serene sage drinks in the scenic beauty, a mortally-wounded *Krauncha* bird, brought down by the arrow of a hunter, falls at his feet. Hovering around the dying, bleeding male bird, is his piteously shrieking mate who a moment ago was with her beloved. Compassion instantly wells up in the heart of the sage, and finds expression in the famous *śloka "Maa Nishaada..."* "O fowler, may you know no rest for endless years, since you killed one of this pair of *Krauncha* birds while it was under the spell of love." It was a perfect *śloka* born out of *śoka* (sorrow). Yes. It was sorrow taking the form of a song, *śoka* embodying itself in *śloka*. Using this *śloka* as a model, Vālmeeki composed his *Rāmāyana* for all mankind to recite and transcend sorrow.

The *Rāmāyana* has been, is and will ever be, the *living legacy* of India because it unfolds the story of RĀMA and SEETA who are purer than purity itself and whose scrupulous adherence to the majesty of the moral law, *dharma*, is an abiding example to be emulated by all who have higher aspirations. Rāma has been venerated by millions, for thousands of years, age after age, as the highest of the high, the Ideal Man — *Maryāda Purushottama, the effulgent embodiment of dharma. And of Seeta, the paragon of virtue, grace, purity and beauty,* Swami Vivekānanda says, *"You may exhaust the literature of the world that is past and I may assure you that you will have to exhaust the literature of the world of the future, before finding another Seeta. Seeta is unique; that character was depicted once and for all. There may have been several Rāmas perhaps, but never more than one Seeta. Mark my words. Seeta has gone into*

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the very vitals of our race."

Ādikāvya Vālmeeki Rāmāyana is the first ever *kāvya* in Sanskrit literature. Inspired by Vālmeeki's *ādikāvya*, poet-saints from all over India have authored different versions of the epic in their respective tongues. We have Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Manipuri, Malayalam, Odissi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit versions, too, to name a few (see page 753). All of these are more than mere translations. The mystic revolutionary and patriot, Shri V V S Aiyar, a contemporary of Mahāyōgi Sri Aurobindo, makes the following incisive observations in his Introduction to the Bhavan's Book University series title, *Kamba Rāmāyana — A Study**: "Indian poets even of the second rank have with unerring good sense abstained from translating the Sanskrit classics, but instead have re-written them in their own way for their countrymen. Thus while Europe has but one *Iliad* and one *Aeneid* and a host of translations of these epics, India has not one *Rāmāyana* and one *Mahābhārata* but at least a score of *Rāmāyanās* and *Mahābhāratās*." Among these the most well-known by far are the *Rāmcharitmānas* of Tulasidas in Hindi and Kamban's *Rāmāyanam* in Tamil.

This is Shri V V S Aiyar's penetrating assessment of *Kavicakravarti* Kamban's wondrous Tamil work *Rāmāyanam:*

"When a mahākāvya of an earlier poet is taken up for the theme of an epic by a later one, the influence of the original writer becomes a leaden weight and a shackle to the poet who attempts a 're-do' of it. But Kamban, while following Vālmeeki, has the breadth and power of Ādisesha who bears the entire weight of the world on his single head. The poetic atmosphere, the significant structure, the psychological frame, in short the entire weight of the poetic inspiration and mystic intuitions of Vālmeeki, became handmaids to Kamban; and with his singular skill and sense of beauty, he makes Vālmeeki's key ideas, key images

* *First published in 1950 by the Delhi Tamil Sangham. The Bhavan published it in 1965 in the Book University series.*

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and key symbols, adornments to his own form and vision of the epic."

In his Foreword to the first edition of Justice N Chandrasekhara Aiyer's *Vālmeeki Rāmāyana**, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru says, "*Rāmāyana*, the great epic of our race, has moulded the thoughts and emotions of uncounted generations of people of India during past ages. From the peasant in the field and the worker in the factory to the highbrow and the scholar, the story of Rāma and Seeta has become a living one."

Culture and civilisation, however, do not recognise man-made national boundaries and stringent immigration regulations. The influence and impact of this master epic broke the confines of India long, long ago. Several versions of the *Rāmāyana* and episodic narratives culled from this *akshaya pātra* (inexhaustible reservoir) have become a part of the cultural milieu of many countries of Asia, particularly Myanmar (Burma), Japan, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia and Laos (see page 757 ff.). The *Rāmāyana* has also entered the consciousness of the West in the last two centuries, through the inspired labour of Indologists.

That the *Rāmāyana* and the ideals enshrined therein, inspire and enthral the people of many lands, is evidenced by the well-patronised yearly International *Rāmāyana* Conferences held in different parts of the world. The first International *Rāmāyana* Conference was held on November 27, 1984, on the banks of the Sarayu in Ayōdhya on the auspicious *Rāma-Seeta Vivāha Panchami* day of that year. Since then such conferences were held in Bangkok, Thailand (June, 1986); Toronto (July, 1987); Shringverpur, Chitrakoot, Naimishāranya and Kanpur (December, 1988); with seminars at Delhi, Ayōdhya, Nandigram, Prayag, Janakpur and Nepal (November-December, 1989); Mauritius (August, 1990); Surinam (October 1990); Leuven, Belgium (July, 1991); Bali, Indonesia (July 1992); Chitrakoot, Mahuwa and Kanpur (December 1993); Thammasat, Thailand (December 1994); Leiden, Holland (1995); and Shenzhen, China (1996).

Preparations are afoot for the next International *Rāmāyana* Conference in

* *Published by the Bhavan in 1953*

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Houston, USA, in May 1997. This Great Adventure in Faith, of global cultural dissemination, was initiated and sustained by the selfless devotion and dedication of the renowned *Rāmāyana* scholar, Shri Lallan Prasad Vyas of Delhi, an intimate friend and well-wisher of the Bhavan.

Shri C Rājagopālachāri's English version of the *Rāmāyana* (first published in 1951) is one of the earliest titles in the Bhavan's Book University series. In 1956, when the sales of this literary gem, bequeathed to the Bhavan by Rājāji, crossed the 100,000th mark, Prime Minister Nehru, enthusiastically releasing the latest edition at the Bhavan's New Delhi Kendra, feelingly hailed it as "a landmark in the history of publishing in India." It has now run into 30 editions, and the sales have crossed over five hundred thousand copies, unaided by any promotional campaign! It still is one of our best-selling titles. Rājāji's book has been translated into Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Telugu, French, Italian, Japanese, Spanish and Polish. Audio cassettes of the book will soon be released in the USA. A list of books on the *Rāmāyana* by different distinguished writers, published by the Bhavan, is given on page 758. A list of Rāmāyana-related studies published in India is given on page 760 ff.

Eight years ago, Dr H Venkataramana Hande who has had the privilege of a close association with Rājāji, took up the stupendous task of rendering Kamban's divine Tamil classic into English prose. Dr Hande, a medical practitioner who was a Minister for Health in Tamil Nadu, is a long-standing *janasevak*. In the third edition of the *Rāmāyana*, Rājāji in his Preface averred, "Once again I repeat my confession that in the evening of my life during a great and eventful period of Indian history, the writing of the books wherein I have retold the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* is, in my opinion, the best service I have rendered to my people. At any rate, they embody the best joy I have experienced; for, in these two books, I helped our great sages to speak to our dear men and women again, elevating their minds. The real need of the hour is a *re-communion between us and the sages of our land, so that the future is built on rock and not on sand." We are sure that Dr Hande's ecstatic exhilaration, creative satisfaction and sense of fulfilment at the happy culmination of his dedicated labour,*

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FOREWORD

The Rāmāyana is not an epic of India alone but of the whole world. There is not a single country in which the Rāmāyana or at least some one or other of its aspects, traditions or morals, is not known. In any event, the whole of South East Asia is familiar with the Rāmāyana, even though there may be variations from country to country, in respect of one part of the story or the other, contained in the Rāmāyana.

As far as India is concerned, the Rāmāyana took its birth from Vālmiki in Sanskrit; and the story caught the imagination and fascination of the people to such an extent that some part of it or other found a place either independently or as part of some other work that originated from the country. It has spread to other parts of South East Asia as a result of the people of India going to these parts along with the said story, in as much as the same was ingrained in their lives themselves and therefore took root there with variations in the details of the story here and there.

The first author of this great epic is Vālmiki in Sanskrit and the other two well-known versions are by Kamban in Tamil and Tulasidas in Hindi. The present book is concerned with Kamban's version of the epic referred to as Kamban's Rāmāvatāram or Kamban's Rāmāyanam. There has been, from the time point of view, a long interval between Vālmiki and Kamban and admittedly Kamban has taken the story from Vālmiki. However, Kamban proved to be a greater artist as a poet, in his version of Rāmāyana. In fact, Kamban is admitted to be the greatest epic poet in Tamil because of this creation of his.

Shri V V S Aiyar has pointed out in his `Kamba Rāmāyana - A Study`, a Delhi Tamil Sangam publication: "It is not easy to convince the literary world at this late hour of day that there is, unsuspected by the greater part of it, a Tamil poet who is worthy to take rank with the greatest names in literature. It is, however, my purpose in this book to make an attempt to prove that in the RĀMĀYANA OF KAMBAN the

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world possesses an epic which can challenge comparison not merely with the Iliad and the Aeneid, Paradise Lost and the Mahābhārata, but with its original itself, namely, the Rāmāyana of Vālmiki. This is not the language of mere patriotic enthusiam. It is an opinion that has grown slowly with the years and after deep and careful study. And I hope to make the impartial reader rise from the study of this monograph with a conviction of the truth of my contention and with a desire to know more of the poet than what he will see exhibited within the pages of this volume."

Similarly, in his Foreword to KAMBAN by the late Justice S Maharajan published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, Professor Edward Leuders, Department of English, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, observes: "It is clear to me even from a cursory reading of these excerpts that the translator is working with both a poet and an epic poem of high calibre indeed. The characteristic reach of the poet, Kamban, for cosmic personification in his poetry clearly ties these high and abstract matters to very human detail. It is the world of human experience he deals with, and it is through the exaltation of poetic song that he achieves what all the world's great poetry attempts to achieve — a marriage of the divine and timeless with the earthly and experiential".

Such is the work of Kamban in his Rāmāyanam that to everyone who is familiar with the work, he is Kavicakravarti (emperor of poets). The fact that Kamban was able to write his epic in more than 10,000 verses of four lines each with astonishing nuances of poetry and at the same time conforming to the known classification of verses in Tamil language, is something not only to be admired but also to be wondered at. It is in view of these features of Kamban's art, admirably displayed in his Rāmāvatāram, his name and fame have become matchless and unrivalled and the word, 'Kavicakravarti' has come to refer only to Kamban, and if anybody else wants to admire or eulogise any other poet as an eminent one, the word, Kavicakravarti is added before his name in an adjectival form.

It is this epic of Kamban that has been rendered into English by Dr H V Hande.

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Once the question of translating the grand poetry of Kamban into another language arises, the point that immediately comes to mind is whether the translation should also be in poetic form or it can be in prose. There is no gainsaying the fact, whether the translation is in the form of verse or in prose, that it is impossible to bring out the beauty, grandeur, majesty and the easy flow of the original of the Master Artist and that too when what the Master Artist has written is something inimitable in style, and selection of words appropriate to the character and the event. In this case, all those who have had occasion to read Kamban to any extent, would have been completely taken in by and absorbed in the genius and the originality displayed. In such a context it is unthinkable that any one can succeed in translating Kamban's Rāmāvatāram into English in verse form.

As a matter of fact, Rajaji, one of the greatest men of our times with profound knowledge of almost every aspect of human life and in whose case, every word that he uttered and every word that he wrote has proved to be profound and prophetic, has translated in English in verse form the Ayōdhya Kāndam of Kamban's Rāmāyana, published by Sahitya Academy in accordance with an agreement between UNESCO and the Government of India, in furtherance of UNESCO's aim to promote mutual appreciation of the cultural values of East and West, and he has the following to say in his preface: "Kamban sang the story of Rāma as of God come down on earth to suffer, chasten, uplift, help and guide men. Apart from this difference in the treatment of the hero, there is considerable difference in poetic form between Vālmiki and Kamban. Kamban's Rāmāyana is a lyric, while Vālmiki's is an epic. The lyric is a string of cut gems with glittering facets sparkling at each turn. It is not a solemn march of predestined sadness like Vālmiki's epic. The lyric sparkle of Kamban and Tulasidas goes well with their constant reminder that Rāma is the Supreme Being Himself.

"The unique characteristic of Tamil verse is the initial rhyme. In good Tamil poetry, unlike the end-rhyme in English or Hindustani, it is not just a purposeless jingle that has become a custom. The initial rhyme in Tamil is a medium of emphasis and climax

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and it is a remarkably efficient instrument for that purpose. So also the alliteration, which is also an essential in Tamil verse, is not merely an idle sound repetition but actively aids the enforcement of the thought and imagery contained in the verse. Of course these aids are of no value in unskilled hands and become just jingles. But in Kamban's art, the alliteration is subdued with great care and the rhyme-words always go up with mounting quality and are never allowed to deteriorate into a laboured selection out of a thesarus. They come as an appropriate climax at the top of an ascending scale. This quality among many other things distinguishes Kamban from the inferior Tamil poets. The lyric cannot be a lyric without conspicuous economy of words, without sparkle and lilt; these are Kamban's special characteristics, not to speak of the depth of his thoughts, his human understanding and his wonderful poetic imagination".

With these grand observations, Rajaji has translated the Ayōdhya Kāndam of Kamban's Rāmāyana in verse form in the said work. Yet he himself states in his preface: "I cannot in an English rendering bring out the rhyme or the sparkle or the lilt in Kamban. I can only attempt to do some justice to the wealth of substance and brevity of presentation. It is not possible to reproduce in a translation the exquisite art of the Tamil poet. This is so indeed in respect of all translations of poetry by the ablest among us. William Cowper wrote in one of his beautiful letters: 'There are minutiae in every language which transferred into another will spoil the version. Such extreme fidelity is in fact unfaithful.'

"But what is one to do if one does not wish to impose on the public and palm off one's own bad composition as a rendering of Kamban? All one can do is to avoid the pitfalls and be as faithful as possible without damage to the purpose. In another letter the same English poet writes: 'There is something in his style that touches me exceedingly and which I do not know how to describe. This property of it which depends perhaps altogether upon the arrangement of his words and the modulation of his sentences, it would be very difficult to preserve in a translation'.

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"Yet another quotation from Cowper dealing with the difficulty of satisfactory translation: 'It cost me all the morning yesterday and all the evening to translate a single simile to my mind. The transitions from one member of the subject to another, though easy and natural in the Greek, turn out often so intolerably awkward in an English version that almost endless labour and no little address are requisites to give them grace and elegance.' I must say that I have gone through many occasions of this kind especially where Kamban, in the midst of the human narrative, suddenly and with exquisite beauty reminds his readers of the fact that Rāma was God incarnate. Often I felt it best to omit such passages in the translation".

The observations of Rajaji would have been the experience of any one who made a serious attempt to translate Kamban's work into English or for that matter into any other language. In spite of pointing out the difficulties above quoted, Rajaji did translate the Ayōdhya Kāndam only in verse form.

However, as far as the present work is concerned, Dr Hande, who had been an admirer and disciple of Rajaji, has very wisely refrained from making any attempt to translate the whole of Kamban's Rāmāyana, in English, in verse form. What he has done in this case is an easy prose rendering in English of Kamban's Rāmāvatāram. Naturally in such a rendering, the art form referred to by Rajaji in the quotation extracted above, will be difficult, if not impossible, to adopt. The result is an easy and clear prose version of Kamban's Rāmāvatāram in English without making any unsuccessful attempt to translate the art form of the original Tamil version.

In fact Shri Kasthuri Sreenivasan of Coimbatore in his introduction to his translation of selected verses from the Sundara Kāndam of Kamban's Rāmāvatāram (Published by Kasthuri Sreenivasan Trust, Coimbatore) has observed:

"One of the first questions that a translator has to address himself in undertaking a work of this nature is whether the translation should be in prose or verse. Whenever

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a work of poetry is rendered into prose in a foreign language, its beauty and its subtlety are lost to a very great extent. This is particularly so in the case of Kamban who produces a variety of verse patterns and rhythms according to the mood of the story that any prose version cannot do justice to it. The tempo is designed to suit the mood of the story, the feelings, situations or incidents. When he talks of war, blood and manliness, he uses harsh words. When he describes the tender feelings of women or their beauty, he uses soft mellifluous words and a different tempo. It is this combination of sound and rhythm with ideals, feelings and incidents into an integral whole that makes Kamban's poetry truly great. But the very beauty of his poetry is the despair of the translator who cannot hope to reproduce the prosody of Kamban in another language. One cannot hope to achieve the diversity of the type of verses in the original".

Shri Sreenivasan further points out certain other difficulties in attempting a translation of this nature: "There is considerable amount of exaggeration in Indian poetry in general and Kamba Rāmāyanam in particular. The exaggeration may be said to be almost an art-form. Shoulders tall as Mount Kailas, or the compound walls of Lanka reaching the sun and the moon may be acceptable in the environment of an ancient Tamil epic, but put into modern English, they seem unreal and archaic.... One of the problems in translating a mythological story is in the treatment of the supernatural. To accept it as literal truth is somewhat repugnant to the scientific temper of the modern age. On the other hand, it is quite likely that some of these people did have certain mental and spiritual powers which enabled them to perform feats which seem impossible for us today. Modern psychology is just beginning to probe into this vast field of the potentialities of the mind. The ancient people probably had a greater knowledge of science than we give credit to them. Under these circumstances, one can only speculate on what was real and what was due to the poet's imagination, be skeptical in accepting things literally, but keep an open mind. To eliminate the supernatural altogether is impossible. The natural and supernatural are so inextricably interwoven that any attempt to remove it would be to destroy the literary and artistic merits of the story.

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"Further, certain figures of speech which are peculiar to a particular time and place are often untranslatable into a different medium in a different age. Kamban also makes a large number of allusions to mythological stories with which the non-Tamil or the non-Hindu reader might not be familiar. Another problem of translation is the use of a large number of qualifying phrases to people or places involved, in many of the verses. For example, he says, 'Rāvana who was a result of boons from Brahma who was born from the navel of Vishnu reclining in the milky sea with the divine snake Ādisesha as his bed....' and so on. Tamil grammar lends itself to such phraseology which cannot be compressed into a single line in the English language..... This raises a question of ethics. How much freedom should be permitted to a translator to modify the original? I believe that ideas, thoughts, the basic philosophy, the nature of characterisation and the major elements in the story should not be tampered with by a translator. He must be true to the original. If he wishes to modify them, then his work should be called an adaptation and not a translation. But when figures of speech are untranslatable or have changed their meaning in course of time, or are no longer relevant, the translator can use his discretion in modifying them while preserving the spirit of the original. The objective should be to recreate the original in the new language exactly as the poet would have done had he been alive..... In rendering the sweep, the grandeur and the majesty of Kamban's verse in another language, one cannot hope to be completely successful".

The above problems indicated by Shri Kasthuri Sreenivasan would have been experienced by anyone who had attempted to translate any epic poem in one language into another language. That probably is the reason that prompted Dr Hande to avoid the verse form and to render the story in the form of running prose in English. In such an endeavour, it is inevitable that certain imageries and descriptions would have to be omitted since if they are literally translated, that would not have made the meaning of the other parts or words clear and the context unambiguous. Of course, when such a method is adopted, the work cannot be strictly called an English translation of Kamban's Rāmāvatāram. However, so long as the author makes it clear what he has

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done and how he has approached these problems there will be no question of want of fidelity to the original.

As far as the present work is concerned, Dr Hande, having regard to the difficulties, features and problems referred to above, has concentrated his attention on the story as told by Kamban and to the extent I have been able to go through parts of them, there has not been any omission of any relevant or important material in the story as told by Kamban though some of the imageries and allusions, in the use of which Kamban has been liberal, might have been omitted, lest the inclusion of them should make certain actions and events essential to the understanding of the story, vague and ambiguous.

It is remarkable that Dr Hande whose mother tongue is Kanarese and who had studied Telugu as his subject in his scholastic career, has taken the trouble of going through Kamban's Rāmāvatāram in Tamil and giving the same in English in prose form. It is not surprising that he has taken nearly eight years to complete the entire work having regard to the precautions that have to be taken in such a difficult and delicate task of avoiding omissions in any verse referring to events, occurrences and adjectives that may affect the substance or detract from the basic objective and purpose of the poet's work.

Dr Hande by this devoted work of his, has earned the gratitude of all students of Kamban, because barring the short prose version by Shri R K Narayan, no one to my knowledge, has attempted a systematic rendering of Kamban's Rāmāvatāram into English even in such a running prose form.

No.8, Justice Sundaram Road,
Mylapore, Chennai - 600 004.
October, 1996

M M ISMAIL

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PREFACE

It was with a great deal of nervous hesitation and humility that I ventured to render Kamban's *Rāmāvatāram*, an epic of 10,000-odd, 4-line stanzas, into English prose. I was inspired to attempt this, over eight years ago, after reading a couple of English translations of Vālmeeki's *Rāmāyana*.

My effort is not a verbatim translation of the work of Kamban, the emperor of Tamil poets, but only a free rendering in English. In fact, I have abridged five chapters of BĀLA KĀNDAM which describe the march of Dasaratha's entourage from Ayōdhya to Mithila and also a few portions of YUDDHA KĀNDAM.

After delving deep into Kamban's work, I am convinced that exposure to it, is a must for every lover of Truth and literature, irrespective of his or her creed or nationality. Vice and virtue, filial duty, fraternal love, loyalty, friendship, marital fidelity and more, have been splendidly dealt with by the poet in his eternally relevant divine masterpiece.

Kamban's poetic genius lies in his brilliant use of rhyme, alliteration, simile and epithet; all of which he skilfully blends, making a recitation of his work an audio-visual treat. So musical are the words and so vivid the imagery! While it is impossible to reflect the poetry of such an original in a prose translation, especially into English, I have tried my best to do justice to his unque similes and apt epithets. I have even resorted to archaic words or usages, at times, to this end.

Wherever I have wanted the reader to pause and internalise a concept, or a sentiment, I have italicised the text. If the reader derives as much from this book, as I did from writing it, I would consider my labour of love amply rewarded.

With boundless pleasure I dedicate this book to the people of Tamil Nādu who have showered their love on me so profusely all these years.

H V HANDE

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KAMBAN THE POET

Kamban was born in the ninth century in Therazhundur, a village in Thanjavur district. The greatest of the poets who wrote in Tamil and enriched its literature, Kamban hailed from a family which had Lord Narasimha (who emerged from a Kamba or pillar) as its family deity. Kamban was also called Kamba Nāttāzhwār, as he revived the greatness of Tamil through his work *Kamba Rāmāyanam.* Some believe that because he tied to himself the elephant known as Rāma with the rope of his devotion, he resembled a pillar (Kamba), and therefore came to be known as Kamban. A few believe that he was so named because, as an infant, he was found lying near the pillar of a temple. Kamban's narration of the incarnation of Lord Tirumāl (Mahāvishnu) as Rāma, is not a translation of Vālmeeki's *Rāmāyana*, but an original retelling of the story of Rāma.

Kamban was a great scholar in Tamil as well as Sanskrit. Extolled as *Kavicakravarti* (the emperor of poets), he rendered the *Rāmāyana* into nectarous verses in Tamil. He had the grace of Lord Narasimha and Kāli Devi. Legend has it that Kāli Devi used to hold a lamp to light the place, while he wrote the *Rāmāyanam*. Saraswati, the goddess of learning, is believed to have sat before him, apprising him each day of the approach of dawn as he was too engrossed in writing to notice anything.

Great poets have observed that even a life of unbounded happiness in this world or in heaven would not give the pleasure equal to that obtained by reading *Kamba Rāmāyanam.*

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IN SALUTATION

The poetry created by Kamban – a constant worshipper of Lord Rāma – is of such pristine purity that it stands out as a monumental epic, bringing glory to Tamil. There is nothing in this world that is difficult to accomplish for a person who falls at the feet of Poet Kamban, because it was he who dispelled the darkness of ignorance from the minds of poets through his *Rāmāyanam.* Let us worship Kamban whose poetry successfully binds the 'elephant' known as Rāma, an 'elephant' which even the Devas or the Siddhas, or for that matter, even Lord Siva or Lord Brahma could not bind.

Let us keep the sacred anklets of that great Kamban on our heads because he spread the divine name of Rāma everywhere, and was also responsible for making the Tamil-speaking people take to reading Rāmāyana with avidity. Whether one ruled with all the wealth available in this world, or enjoyed oneself in the cool shade of the karpaga trees in the celestial world, one would not attain the mental satisfaction obtained by reading the *Rāmāyanam* written by Poet Kamban. It was given to Sage Vālmeeki to listen to the narration of Sage Nārada and reproduce the great adventures of Rāma, the incarnation of Lord Mahāvishnu, in Sanskrit verse; *but then it was given to Kamban of Therazhundur of the Chola kingdom to conclude the singing of Rāma's life in the great language of Tamil.* In days of yore, Lord Mahāvishnu gave the nectar of immortality to the Devas by churning the ocean of milk with the Mandara mountain. *Like Mahāvishnu, the great Kavicakravarti Kamban gave the nectar of Rāmāyanam to mankind by churning another ocean of milk, namely Tamil, with his tongue.The arangetram* of Kamba Rāmāyanam was done at the Srirangam temple in an assembly of poets, under the auspices of the philanthropist, Sadayappan** of Tiruvennainallur, on the day of the Uttara star, in the month of Panguni, in the eight hundred and seventh year of Sālivāhana saka.*

* *Presenting in public for the first time*

** *Poet Kamban frequently refers to the name of his benefactor, the philanthropist Sadayappan of Tiruvennainallur, in Kamba Rāmāyanam.*

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BĀLA KĀNDAM

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BĀLA KĀNDAM

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KAMBAN'S PREFACE

We surrender ourselves to God, the omnipotent Lord of the universe, who creates it, sustains it and eventually destroys it, endlessly playing these divine 'games'. How can I ever describe this God when even scholarly seers are unable to understand or explain Him?

Out of the three qualities known as Sattwa (equilibrium), Rajas (activity) and Tamas (inertness), the quality of Sattwa belongs to the foremost of gods. Immersing ourselves in Sattwa alone, is good for us.

While chanting the immeasurable and immortal scriptures, it is customary to say 'Hari Om' both at the beginning and at the end. Only those who chant them can detach themselves from the cravings of the five senses and realise the intrinsic merit of the scriptures. After achieving this detachment, they will remain attached only to the sacred feet of God who is the essence of truth and who is always merciful to His devotees.

My efforts to narrate the story of the flawless and victorious Rāma can be compared to the efforts of a cat reaching the roaring ocean of milk and trying to drink it all up. Rāma's arrows are as infallible as the curse of the learned. The history of this great Rāma was written by Sage Vālmeeki. While his poem has been widely acclaimed as the best in the country, I, the humblest of the humble, have dared to compose my own verses. *In spite of the worldly humiliation that I might suffer and the consequent blemish that I might attract, if I have composed these verses, it is solely because of my earnest desire to show to the world the greatness of the divine poem composed by Vālmeeki, who has mastered the art of flawless poetic creation.*

To the ears of the good and the noble, who are accustomed to listening to varied rich verses, mine might be painful* like the unbearable loud sound of the beating of drums to the sensitive ears of asunam, the music-loving bird, especially after it has consumed the honey of music from the stringed instrument, yāzh! Let me request the great scholars who have properly mastered the three facets of Tamil literature

* *While it is impossible for one to agree with these lines of Kamban, they enhance the greatness of the poet who so bountifully demonstrates his humility.*

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(Muttamizh)* not to take the utterances of lunatics, fools and crazy devotees like me seriously! Wise persons who are experts in architecture will not frown at children who scribble drawings of houses with apartments for living and elevated platforms for dancing. Similarly, I expect literary scholars not to be angry with me for composing my worthless verses! I crave their pardon for my ignorance! I have followed the footsteps of the great sage, Vālmeeki, in composing this Rāmāyanam in Tamil *verse*. These epic verses, describing the greatness of Lord Mahāvishnu's incarnation as Rāma, were composed at Sadayappa Vallal's** native place Tiruvennainallur.

Those who extol the prowess of Rāma's mighty arms, which are always adorned by the garland of success, will get all the wealth sought by them. They will acquire knowledge and fame. Even, the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi (dwelling in the fragrant lotus) who confers mōksha (liberation), will bestow her benevolent attention on them.

1. THE RIVER

Let us describe the beauty of the Sarayu River flowing in the land of Kōsala where neither the arrows of the five senses of men nor the darting glances of young women would stray from the path of dharma. Clouds as white as the sacred ash (vibhuti or tiruneer), seen on the forehead of Lord Siva, would leave a trail of beauty in their path. These white clouds would consume water from the sea and become dark blue resembling the complexion of Lord Mahāvishnu.

Seeing the Himalaya (praiseworthy 'father-in-law' of Lord Siva) getting heated by the sun, the water-soaked clouds rising from the sea would bathe the mountain. The whole sight was awe-inspiring as though all the water from the sea had risen to the peak of the mountain. Streaks of rain-water that fell on this golden Himalaya mountain looked like silver wires. As a manifestation of unbounded generosity, the clouds would yield copious rain. *The water from the rain would swell like the unlimited fame of a generous king who followed the path of dharma shown by king Manu, and like the bountiful gifts offered to sages full of Védic knowledge.* The torrential rain would behave like women who sell themselves to men. Just as these

* *The three facets are, Iyal (prose), Isai (music), and Nātakam (drama).*

** *Vallal in Tamil means philanthropist.*

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women would embrace the head, the chest and the legs of men and hurriedly leave them after extracting their price, the water would embrace the mountain peak, the body, the foothills, and would flow down rapidly taking away all the wealth of the mountain. The water could also be compared to merchants because it carried away in its stream, gold, gems, exquisite peacock feathers, the ivory tusks of elephants, and logs of costly aquila and sandalwood trees. The torrential rain-water could again be compared to the rainbow because it reflected the varied hues of flowers, minerals, honey, gold and elephants' saliva. Like Rāma's Sétu (causeway), pieces of rocks and uprooted trees and leaves obstructed the flow of the rain-water. *The flies and wasps that swarmed the water, attracted by its intoxicating odour, resembled men who consume liquor and belch, forgetting their heritage, noble qualities and status.* The loud, raucous sound raised by the flowing water resembled the tread of joyous elephants and other beasts. It appeared as though the flood water was marching out to wage a war with the sea king!

Down the ages, the Sarayu River had imbibed the greatness of countless kings of the Solar dynasty and was an eternal source of nourishment (like the breasts of a mother to her children) to all the living creatures of this huge world surrounded by the sea. Its waters had the fragrance of scented powder prepared by the women of the hilly tract, mixed with the fragrance of saffron, kōshtam (a medicinal plant), cardamom, sandalwood trees, cassia, silk cotton, sweet-smelling grass and medicinal herbs and honeycombs found on the hills. Like the victorious army of a king bringing untold agony to the enemy, the speeding Sarayu River ruined the hamlets of the hunters and made the womenfolk beat their bellies in agony.

Behaving at times like Lord Krishna (who danced on the hoods of the serpent), the water consumed the frozen curd, flavoured milk and pure ghee stored in pots, and snatched the clothes of doe-eyed milkmaids. The flow of the water made the sylvan tract a hilly one, converted the fertile soil into a sylvan tract, and the maritime tract into an outstanding cultivable land. *Thus, the Sarayu exhibited its power over the land it traversed, like the effects of good and evil deeds on the interchange of births of living beings in this world.* The peasants heard the joyful sound of its gushing waters which threw huge droplets all over and spilled pearls and gold on the banks. *Shafts of this water pierced the land and turned into innumerable canals, like the branching of a family tree. Originating from the Himalaya mountain and joining the sea, the Sarayu River eludes a full description like the Almighty God who cannot be described wholly even*

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by the Védas. Again, just as the same single God is described differently by different people, the Sarayu exhibits different forms in different places, looking like a lake or a tank in one and a stream or a canal in another. Like life entering the body in four different ways, the overflowing Sarayu River passed through groves, thick champaka forests, big tanks and gardens with slender creepers.

2. THE COUNTRY

Sage Vālmeeki wrote the Rāmāyana in verses which none could change or improve. The sweet verses were melodious to the ears of the Devas, too. The land of Kōsala described by Vālmeeki can at best be extolled by me like a dumb person trying to speak. *I have ventured to do this, having consumed the 'wine' of my love for this land.*

Kōsala was so beautiful that on the bunds of paddy fields, pearls were present; on the sluices through which water flowed, conches were seen; on the banks of streams, crimson golden particles were found; in the pits where buffaloes rested, red lotuses abounded; where ploughed fields were levelled, corals were seen; where red paddy was grown, swans were found; inside sugar-cane crops, fine honey was available; and in the beautiful groves, crowds of bees intoxicated with honey were seen. The sound of the flowing river, the voices of the peasants working on sugar-cane crushers, the sound of cane juice flowing forth, the sound of conches found along the riverside, the sound of clashing bulls and jumping buffaloes mingled together in the fertile land of Kōsala.

Kōsala where dancers as well as audiences were provided by mother nature was enchanting. Peacocks danced beautifully choosing groves as dancing halls; creepers acted as maids holding lotus flowers as lamps; clouds thundered like drums; waves rising from water tanks acted as curtains; bees hummed sweetly like the melodious tunes of the makarayāzh (a musical instrument), and the water-lilies were the audience who did not even blink their eyes. In that land of Kōsala, Tirumagal (Goddess Lakshmi) stayed in lotus flowers; eyes of lustful women and the arrows of Manmatha attacked sensuous men; corals and pearls were created by big clouds; while truth and the essence of literature sought their abodes on the tongues of the people. In that land of Kōsala, conches rested pleasantly in water; buffaloes slept in the shade of trees; bees stayed in the garlands adorning the people; tortoises stayed in mire; pearl oysters were found in the waters; swans stayed in paddy heaps; and peacocks stayed happily in groves.

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Everything seen in that land gleamed, whether it was the gold that surfaced while ploughing, or the pearls that were produced by oysters, or the lustrous gems that were seen when fields were dug, or the blooming faces of peasant women, or lotus flowers! Beautiful women with clear, dark eyes, sleeping upstairs in silvery mansions on cots of gold shining like bright sunlight, were awakened in that land of Kōsala by the tunes of drunken flute-players, holding the melodious yāzh (a musical instrument) accompanied by the beat of leather drums. Prosperity in the land of Kōsala was such that nectar from the sugar-cane juice, nectar-like toddy tapped from palm and coconut trees, nectar from the juices of fruits in the groves, honey dripping from honeycombs, and nectar that came out of the flowers worn by people, mingled together freely and flowed into the sea where ships sailed. All types of fishes merrily drank these varieties of nectar that found their way into the sea.

The women of Kōsala used to bathe in fresh water after smearing their hair with the paste of musk and fragrant flowers. The waves of the black sea which received this water, spread this scent everywhere. The red lips of the women, which emitted sweet honey-like words, and their sword-like sharp eyes with which they fascinated the men of the land of Kōsala, were beyond description. While men wearing large ear-rings bathed in the river, the turmeric and white and red sandalwood paste from their bodies dissolved in the water and spread into the nearby groves and paddy fields. Bees swarmed around to take in this scent. *Strutting with firm legs and appearing like women with bright eyes which could vanquish sél fish, the swans of Kōsala nurtured their cygnets on the 'beds' of lotus flowers. Buffaloes with mire in their feet thought of their offspring and mooed. The motherly affection of these buffaloes resulted in milk flowing from their udders. The cygnets would drink this milk and go to sleep lulled by the songs of greenish frogs!* In the groves, male and female cuckoos fondled one another; peacocks danced on the branches of trees more gracefully than sharp-eyed dancing-girls, and made the groves appear lovelier than dance halls. Bees sang the morning songs to awaken the royal swans asleep in their lotus beds. All thrived in Kōsala.

Some of the people of that land got themselves involved in weddings of their choice; some enjoyed literature and music which were as inseparable as the flying eagle and its shadow; some abandoned themselves to the enjoyment of listening to the text of good books, which was sweeter than nectar to their ears; yet others took pleasure in feasting their guests and seeing their faces beam with happiness. There was no dearth of

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heroism among the fauna of Kōsala. Two cocks would attack each other – with knives tied to their legs – with great ferocity, even in the absence of enmity between them. They would rather die fighting than allow any blemish to tarnish their brave lives. *Two he-buffaloes with red eyes would fight and dash against each other with such thunderous fury that it would look as if darkness divided into two factions fought.* The loud noise raised by people who were thrilled by such fights would reach the region of the clouds. The peasants of Kōsala would drive the bulls at their ploughs in such commanding tones that the young shoots of the white lotus plants with thorny stems would split; pearls and golden particles would get pushed aside; gems would get scattered all around; exquisite conches known as 'Salancala' would weep aloud; tortoises would draw their heads and legs into their shells; and the 'varāl' fish would go into hiding in river banks.

Frowning when necessary, taxing after proper estimates, collecting taxes without causing pain, showing compassion to all living beings in his kingdom, and banishing greed for unlawful wealth, the great king of Kōsala protected his subjects by pursuing the path of dharma. It was like Mother Earth shedding her load and relaxing, or a ship lying with its back resting on the maritime tract after unloading its cargo of gold.

There was prosperity everywhere in the land of Kōsala. Peasants stored harvested paddy sheaves in heaps touching the very sky. They were trampled and pounded by the legs of buffaloes which obeyed their masters' commands. The paddy thus gathered was stored in the paddy yards. A portion of the paddy was given as charity to the poor who came to these yards; the rest was taken home to feed guests. The quantity of paddy loaded in the carts was so great that the tracts were pressed down! Like bees collecting nectar from fertile flowers, peasants collected paddy from the fields; secured products from fragrant well-grown trees; obtained corn and other grains from groves; and dug out edible roots from the ground. All over the land, people belonging to all sections lived happily in their homes, with their guests and relatives, enjoying fruits like mangoes, jackfruit and bananas; cereals dripping with ghee; and rice mixed with curds and sugar candy. In the cultivable land of Kōsala, male-bees mistook the dark eyes of the bright lotus-faced young women for beautiful female-bees, and remained there longingly. The breasts of voluptuous women (with eyes that conquered even Manmatha) annoyed and captivated men working in the fields. She-buffaloes looking like black clouds, would think of their offspring left alone in the village cattle-sheds and shed torrential milk from their udders enriching the paddy crops. Kitchens in that

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land were always full of food. Rice was cooked with a loud noise. Ricewater flowed in floods through the groves and enriched the fields of tender paddy crops. Glittering gems dug up by the two legs of white cocks, were mistaken for glow-worms by flocks of birds and were stored by them in their nests. The noise raised during the churning of slabs of white curds by the beautiful hands of slim-waisted women, resembled the wailing sound from the white conches. Young parrots lisped pleasant words in the corn-fields; young bees hummed from the buds of flowers; flocks of birds chirped from water resources; and auspicious songs were heard from the homes of philanthropists. Unwanted garbage swept and collected in a heap in that land, was invariably the pearls spilled by young girls hailing from the maritime tract while they built toy houses.

Fearless rams with striped horns and mighty heads, equal in strength, dashed against each other creating a thunderous noise. As a result, moist clouds became frightened and opened their 'mouths' with lightning! The uproar caused by heroic hunters living in mountain forests (where wild elephants were caught and separated from their mates and offspring), frightened the male swans playing with female swans and made them run away. Those who dug up the ground for extracting tubers, along with them cleared gems mixed in the soil; tortoises sucked the mangoes touching the ground; and swans which used to stay in lotus flowers, slept in punnai trees. The folk songs of the women in the paddy fields put the calves in the courtyard of shepherds (with flutes) to sleep. The classical music of women in maritime tracts, captivated the guards of grain-fields, distracting them from their duties. The wild winds in the hilly tracts made the bamboos dash against each other violently, resulting in the breaking of honeycombs from which honey flowed (like snakes hanging from trees) into the red lotus tanks. The sluices of the tanks released the honey with such force as to break the stems of tender plants, and allow the honey to be consumed by whorled conches.

The women of that land were bountifully blessed with wealth and lasting education, which enabled them to sit back and do nothing except offer munificent charity to the poor who approached them. In all the choultries where food was ungrudgingly offered to everyone, there were heaps of vegetables cut by curved knives resembling crescent moons and heaps of cereals and pearly white rice. For all the inhabitants of that country, trading ships brought immeasurable riches; the land yielded bountiful wealth; mines gave precious gems; *and their ancestry conferred on them great virtues. The inhabitants of that land did not fear death because they never sinned; they were never angry because of their noble thoughts; they always prospered because they performed only righteous*

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deeds. In that land of Kōsala, it was only floods that deviated from their path; never the people! The only things that lost their identities were the kunkumam smeared shoulders of women; not other things! The only things that were narrow were the waists of women; not their minds! The only thing that was maddening was their hair decorated with fragrant flowers; not any other thing!

The aquila smoke engulfing the hair of women, the smoke from kitchens and the smoke from the sugar factories, mingled with the smoke arising from the sacred fire of yāgas performed with the recitation of the four Védas, and spread everywhere like clouds. Peacocks ran away vanquished by the complexion of the women of Kōsala; the rays of the sun were surpassed by the gem-studded ornaments hung over the breasts of these women; the clouds over the groves were vanquished by the hair of these women; while their eyes vanquished kayal fish. Red water-lilies bloomed like the red lips of the women who bending their waists as if to break them, bathed in the streams. Lotus flowers bloomed like the faces of peasant women who walked gently like the swans gliding in the rivulets. *The sharp eyes of the women of that country scorned at the fate of all the objects that could hold no comparison to them; the gait of these women scoffed at the gait of female elephants; the robust breasts of these women scoffed at lotus-buds; and their faces scoffed at the full moon.* The widely scattered gems in that land vied with the bright rays of the sun; tender coconuts vied with the breasts of women; the foam of milk vied with their robes; and the exquisite wedding drums, because of the sound that they raised, vied with the clouds.

Clouds looked like the best groves of Kōsala; the golden peaks of Mount Meru were comparable to the heaps of paddy stored in yards; the sea full of water was comparable to water stored by dams; and the celestial world was comparable to the rich cities of that land. *Products stored as mountain heaps other than paddy, could only be heaps of pearls. If they were not heaps of white pearls, they could only be heaps of that nectar from the sea known as salt. If they were not heaps of salt, they were only heaps of gold and other precious wealth pushed ashore by rivers; and, if they were not heaps of gold, they could only be heaps of sand containing gems from the sea.* Though the places where young girls played with balls were only sandalwood groves, they gave the impression of being sanbhaga groves because of the natural sanbhaga fragrance that emanated from the bodies of these girls. Similarly, these flower gardens, where youths (looking like Lord Muruga who moved on a peacock) practised with swords and véls, gave the impression of being jasmine forests because of the natural

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jasmine fragrance that emanated from the youths. The koel birds would learn the melodious words of the women of that land; peacocks would learn to dance from these damsels; while shells only ejected pearls resembling their white teeth. Chilled wine was found in the houses of wine dealers. In the houses of peasants who consumed such wine, agricultural implements were found. In the houses of prospective bridegrooms, instruments that sent forth propitious notes were found. In the houses of musicians, curved yāzh fitted with sharp strings were found.

In that land of Kōsala, flower-gardens showered cool fresh nectar; land and sea brought forth big gems and gold; different types of winds brought forth nectar-like breath; and epics poured sweet songs which were absorbed by the ears. Peacocks with exquisite feathers saw their mates in the young girls (with fragrant flowers and pearl chains on their breasts) visiting the gardens, and followed them like young men. *Munificence or charity were absent in this land as there was no poverty at all; there was no display of valour because there were no enemies who dared a straight fight; truth did not stand out as a separate entity because no falsehood was uttered by anyone; nothing had to be explained as everyone was a scholar in that land.*

Carts with loads of gingili, red millets, maize, grams and grain as well as carts carrying loads of nectar-like salt, were driven side by side. As a result, the goods in these carts were found mixed in every place. Sugar candy, honey, liquid jaggery, curds from shepherds' abodes, and toddy, exchanged places like the interchanging of births of living beings depending on the sins committed by them. People who had come for festivals and those who had come for weddings were in different streets where vocal music accompanied by wind instruments and flutes was heard. These people merged together as two rivers from opposite directions. The blare of mighty conches and the boom of large and small drums, got drowned by the heroic shouts coming from warriors. The red hands of women wearing māngalyams displaying the five weapons (conch, disc, mace, bow and sword) of Tirumāl, feeding milk to their children from whose mouths saliva flowed, resembled red lotuses attaining a conical shape after the rising of the moon. *There was great conformity between the internal culture and the external beauty of the people of the land. Justice prevailed because the people of Kōsala did not lead illusory lives; virtues got stabilised because of the unique genial qualities of the women; and, because of their chastity, seasonal rains never failed.*

There was no one who could successfully trace and find the exact boundaries of famous Kōsala full of groves. Not even the Sarayu River and her several tributaries!

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The sea full of water, capable of destroying the land during pralaya, might cross its boundaries and overflow; but Kōsala would not be harmed because it had attained everlasting greatness. We have so far dealt with the praiseworthy features of flawless Kōsala. Let us now proceed to describe its capital city, Ayōdhya.

3. THE CITY OF AYŌDHYA

Everyone of every world, was eager to be born in the great city of Ayōdhya which eminent poets, saints and sanskrit scholars have praised in sweet and lofty verses! It is impossible to describe the beauty of the city of Ayōdhya adequately. Was Ayōdhya the beautiful face of Goddess Earth or was it the vermilion (tilak) on her forehead, was it her eyes, or māngalyam, or the ornament on her breasts, or the place where her life rested? Or, was Ayōdhya the lotus of the goddess of wealth? Was it the Kaustubham (jewel) on Tirumāl's bosom? Or, was it the exquisite Vaikuntham (Vishnu's realm) of the celestial world? Or, could Ayōdhya be the belly of Lord Mahāvishnu in which all lives would be absorbed during pralaya? It was said that the Trinity of Gods (Brahma, Vishnu and Siva) could not find a city equivalent to Ayōdhya. What reason could there be for the sun and moon to be perennially wandering in the sky with great avidity even without blinking, except to look for another city like Ayōdhya?

To bring into being the exquisite city of Ayōdhya, Brahma honed his own skills by creating Devendra's Amarāvati and Kubera's Azhagāpuri. Much to their chagrin, celestial architects like Mayan, who had lost their skills, found that they could not construct a city like Ayōdhya. Who can describe this great city with its lofty mansions that touched the heavens above? When it is said that the city of Ayōdhya was the place from where the virtuous prince Rāma ruled the seven worlds, how could anyone claim that there was a happier place? For all those who do penance conquering their five senses with the help of righteousness and compassion, the only ideal place of surrender is the crimson-eyed Lord Tirumāl. When Lord Tirumāl Himself, with His consort Goddess Lakshmi (Seeta) had stayed with great distinction for a long time in Ayōdhya, how could there be a city greater than it even in the celestial world? All the kings, all the jewels, all the gems hard to secure, all the mighty elephants, horses and chariots, and all other things were available in this city whose greatness sages, Devas, Vidyādharas and others have extolled. When such was its distinction, is there another city that can compare with Ayōdhya?

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Even in the lofty mountains which were as cool as the moon, there was nothing that was tall and raised in squares, exhibiting architectural skills. Nothing was there that could be compared to the walls surrounding Ayōdhya. *The golden walls of the city were so high that they could only be compared to the lofty knowledge of a scholar who had delved deep into several books and mastered their contents. In the matter of one's inability to measure their full height, they were like the immeasurable Védas. The walls were divine because they touched heaven. By containing all the weapons of war, the walls were like saints who contained within themselves their five senses. They resembled Goddess Durga in giving protection and looked like Kāli because of the trident fixed on them. As they were difficult of access, they were like Iswara.* They appeared to peep into the celestial world as though they were curious to know if it was more beautiful than Ayōdhya where damsels with lotus-red feet, thin waists, breasts like tender coconuts, and shoulders like bamboo-shoots lived. The walls of the fort were like the monarchs of the Solar dynasty with common attributes like ruling the subjects with the sceptre, gathering the crown-covered heads of enemies, governing according to the laws of Manu, guarding fortifications and remaining mighty and invincible. Innumerable deadly weapons like spears, swords, bows, tridents, clubs, discs, iron pestles and the like were stored within the fort. Since the royal sceptre and the edicts of the rulers (who possessed the excellent character of protecting the people of the world, and who considered name and fame superior to golden ornaments) belonging to the dynasty of the sun (who dispelled universal darkness), guarded the eight directions and even the celestial world, the walls surrounding Ayōdhya were there more as ornaments.

The walls were surrounded by a moat, like mountains being surrounded by the sea full of waves. *The depth of the moat could be compared to the depths to which the lowly minds of prostitutes could descend; the water in the moat was turbid like the poems of illiterates; the degree of protection that the moat gave the city could be compared to the well-guarded purity of a chaste unwed woman; the turbulent crocodiles which filled the moat were like the five senses which have departed from the pious path.* Mistaking the expansive and unfathomable moat for the frightful sea, a cloud descended on it, collected its water, rose up with difficulty onto the wall thinking it to be a lofty mountain, stayed there for some time and showered rain on it! The lotus flowers in the moat seemed as if they were surrounding the wall to fight with the beautiful radiant faces of the maidens who had once vanquished them. The crocodiles that rose and fell into the moat looked like rutting elephants drowned in the huge sea traversed by

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ships. They waved and swung their tails with such ferocity that they looked like saws that would slice anything that came in their way. The ferocious teeth in their wide open mouths, looked like a row of crescent moons. The furious crocodiles in the moat with their eyes emitting fire looked like Rākshasās fighting with one another in a fierce battle. While the huge crocodiles resembled mountainous elephants, the swans in the moat were like royal white umbrellas. While the waves carrying lotus flowers looked like horses, the fish looked like swords and spears. Thus the very moat was like the army of a king. The walls around the moat were made of silver lined with gold plates. Crystal stones were laid on the bed of the moat making it impossible even for the celestials to distinguish the water in the moat from its crystal bottom.

The portals situated in the four directions appeared to rise higher than even the divine foot of Lord Trivikrama (Mahāvishnu's incarnation as Vāmana) who measured the very heavens. *The excellent character which the four portals bestowed on those who passed through them could be compared to the excellent dharma imparted by the four Védas to all living beings in the world.* The walls of the fort were raised with marble stones. The gaps between the stones were covered with gold plates and precious gems. Diamond-studded pillars stood at appropriate places. Crossbeams made of shining silver were fixed over these pillars. Beams in the wall were made of emerald studded with flawless diamonds and covered with gold. Precious gems, flashing like lightning, were embedded in the shape of lions, in the beams. Over the rows of these beams, onyx (gōmetagam) slabs were laid. The architecturally exquisite towers of the city were totally covered with gold plates. The pinnacles of these towers which went up into the celestial world had gem-studded domes. *The whole spectacle looked like the crown of perennial Princess Earth!*

The white palaces, which were plastered with lime made from white conches, made even the lunar disc appear dark, and resembled the ebullient waves of the ocean of milk struck by a stormy wind. The impregnable gold plates with which the palaces were firmly plastered shone like the bright white rays of the morning sun. The pillars of the palaces were made of diamond. The beams over them were made of emerald. Life-like paintings were drawn on the crossbeams. Even the celestials wondered if such palaces – millions in number – were their own abodes. They had moonstone floors, and pillars of sandalwood standing in rows. The beams raised over them were made of corals and rubies. The strong walls of the palaces were built with sapphire. Innumerable such palaces were seen in Ayōdhya. The pillars were lotus-shaped at the

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bottom. The foundations laid were so deep that they reached the land of the serpents. The palaces were well ventilated and attractively illuminated with bright lights reminding one of slim-waisted, golden, dancing-girls with lotus feet and red lips. Those who entered the beautiful palaces were wonderstruck and never once blinked their eyes. These visitors appeared like celestials owing to the reflection on them of the golden glow of the palaces which resembled the flying chariots of the gods, capable of moving in any direction with the speed of thought. Beautiful damsels with ornaments and heroes with garlands (all paragons of virtue) resided in these palaces. The lustre of the palaces made of gems and gold, spread to the heavens and eclipsed the brightness of the sun! The palaces were all skyscrapers with endless wealth and great fame. They were abodes of innumerable citizens, each one of whom was as eminent and faultless as a righteous king. Flowing with streams of pearl chains, and overflowing with precious gems, these mountain-like palaces of gold glittered with glorious peacocks!

Flags engulfed by fragrant smoke from burning blocks of aquila could not be differentiated from clouds. Tridents atop flag-posts resembled streaks of lightning. Peacock-like damsels with slim waists and big breasts walked inside the palaces with their dancing-bells tinkling. Pearl chains hung on the creepers in the palaces, looked like garlands of flowers from karpaga trees. The palaces were full of these creepers which had tall and strong stalks and were robust like the pleasant hill-plantain trees, making one wonder whether the moon steadily waned because it was rubbed by them! Halls not beautified with gold were decorated with flowering creepers; and palaces which did not have public halls were the ones that belonged to private individuals. Where there were no courtyards, sheds made of pearls were erected. The indestructible golden city of Ayōdhya shone like lightning and sparkled like the rays of the sun. As this city radiated golden light, even the celestial city was compared to it. *The round sun looks long when it rises, shrinks at noon and becomes long again when it sets. It could be said that the various sizes of the sun were but shadows of the beautiful, golden, fire-like damsel known as Ayōdhya!* The clouds over Ayōdhya blended with the scented smoke coming from the burning sticks of aquila used by womenfolk wearing ornamental pelvic girdles, consumed sea water and showered torrential rains which in turn emitted the fragrance of aquila.

The city of Ayōdhya was full of the sweet music of lisping young women who had just come of age. The music emanating from makarayāzh and the vocal music of beautiful women got mixed with the folk music coming from the toddy sellers! The

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pits dug in front of the elephants were filled by the scented powder fallen from the chests of sword-wielding heroes. When the women of the city played with balls, pearls from their ornaments fell on the ground. The lustre of these pearls collected and heaped by the maids, put to shame even the moonlight. *The black eyes of the damsels who danced in the dancing-halls were sharper than the vél.* Lovesick youths, who fell victim to the glances from these sharp eyes, became thin like the waists of these damsels, while their craving for them swelled. A few groves had blooming flowers from which honey dripped. Along with the southern breeze bees entered these gardens to gather honey. The sweet music of the makarayāzh blended beautifully with the vocal music heard everywhere and was supported by the beating of drums. Captivated by this combination of music, parrots which were accustomed to conversing with women, slept happily.

The women of Ayōdhya were all beautiful. Their foreheads were exquisite and looked like bows. Their lips were red like the kovvai fruit. Kicked by their women's lotus feet which were smeared with the paste of red cotton flowers the strong shoulders of men became red, as they made love. The city always sparkled with light making it impossible to distinguish between day and night. The portraits in the city never blinked, as though wanting to keep staring at Ayōdhya's chaste worship-worthy women. The palaces of Ayōdhya where Goddess Lakshmi had chosen to reside were perpetually bright. *The credit for expelling darkness and spreading light in these palaces belonged neither to the ghee-lamps nor to the precious gems in the palaces but only to the glowing bodies of the womenfolk.* The damsels of Ayōdhya, wearing anklets, danced to the rhythmic beat of drums. If there was any sound of dancing that was heard apart from the sound of the anklets of these dancers, it could only be the sound made by the hooves of dancing horses. There was always a graceful smile, and tormenting lustful looks on the faces of the feminine dancers. These girls had waists which became thinner day by day, unable to bear the weight of their voluptuous breasts (covered by garlands of gold and pearls) which swelled day by day. Swans known for their graceful gait, lotus flowers, beautiful fish in the ponds, bees of both genders and intoxicated elephants filled their respective abodes with glee. Besides these, the eyes of women, too, shone with boundless joy. Ferocious lions with their mates resided in their dens at the foot of the hills.

Used garlands thrown out on the streets of Ayōdhya by dancers of both sexes obstructed the galloping horses. The sandalwood paste, removed and thrown from the breasts of beautiful women, made those running in the streets slip and fall. The dust

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raised by the speeding horses hid the gems worn by their riders. The nectar that dripped from the garlands decorating the riders fell on these gems and washed away the dust. The rutting fluid emitted by the unfettered elephants smelt like the flowers of the vengai plant; the mouths of creeper-like women of good ancestry had the fragrance of water-lilies. The ornaments worn by them shone with extraordinary brightness. The wealthy city of Azhagāpuri had hoped that though it could not equal Ayōdhya in charity, it could at least equal her in other respects; but even this hope vanished on seeing the market-places of Ayōdhya. *When such was the grandeur of Ayōdhya, even Amarāvati the capital of Lord Devendra could not compare with it.* The scent of civet and musk would emanate from the men while their pearls would gleam. Their heroes' anklets would roar while their spears would shine. The beautiful gems in the ornaments worn by young men would sparkle like the rays of the rising sun. The musical hum of bees could be heard all over.

The various sounds produced by conches, bugles, fish-shaped lutes, drums, wind instruments and many other musical instruments were heard everywhere. These sounds would drown even the roar of the sea. *The city of Ayōdhya was replete with numerous halls meant for specific purposes, such as halls for measuring the tributes brought by other kings; dancehalls for swan-like damsels; halls for reciting the great scriptures; and halls for debating on the finer points of the arts.* Ayōdhya's streets, decorated with festoons at their bright sunny entrances, were wider than the eight directions; the fluid dripping liberally from the faces of rutting elephants was like a waterfall which can be spotted even from a distance; the rows of horses were more extensive than even the sea. The bright and blooming faces of young women residing in the tall houses (the flags of which touched the rain-bearing clouds), would release shafts from their sharp eyes; and these shafts would hit hard the bosoms of lion-like men. If there was any sound that offset the jangle of the heroes' anklets worn by the kings, it was only the rumble of the golden chariots and the jingle of the bells of the horses drawing these chariots; if the tinkle of the anklets worn by smiling maidens playing with water in the bathing ghats was offset by any other sound, it was only the crooning of the swans on the lotuses!

A few women in that ancient city of Ayōdhya would spend their time moving away from and reuniting with their beloved husbands and by singing melodious songs; some, would listen to the songs of young girls; and some others, would bathe in deep waters and thereafter wear fragrant flowers. Some of the men passed their time by riding trumpeting elephants; some, by driving chariots drawn by horses; and

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some, by making generous gifts to remove the distress of the poor who sought alms. Yet others passed their time in that vast city of Ayōdhya by getting one herd of elephants to fight another; by practising the use of bows and arrows and other war weapons; by riding at different speeds on horses with graceful manes; and by scrutinizing weapons. A few women spent their time in that bright city of Ayōdhya plucking flowers from gardens, prancing about like deer, bathing in the tanks with their youthful husbands after consuming enough liquor to wipe away the redness of their mouths, and gambling.

Just as the white clouds moving in the heavens above absorbed water from the sea, the flags fluttering atop the tall palaces 'licked' water from the celestial rivers. The gateways were fitted with strong festoons; the walls (inner, outer and middle) were of glittering gold and rose beyond the celestial region. Even the heavens were ashamed to compare themselves with Ayōdhya's gateways and walls, the height of which could only be equalled by the fame of Ayōdhya's good mountain-shouldered rulers. Around the city of Ayōdhya, flower beds were raised in the forests, by the side of the banks of sea-like moats, near tanks where women usually bathed, on mountains with springs and waterfalls, near pearl-set pandals, and in groves where bees and wasps gave out music. Incessant drumbeats from the huge drums of Ayōdhya, frightened even the roaring waves of the sea and the thunderous rain-bearing clouds. *There were none in the city who attempted to protect their wealth because there were no thieves; there were none who could be called philanthropists as no one sought alms. In that city of Ayōdhya, it was not possible to single out experts in the different fields of arts and science because there were none who had not mastered all subjects! There were neither haves nor have-nots because all people possessed all types of wealth! The city of Ayōdhya was an ideal place where the seed of education was sown and nurtured into a tree full of strong and beautiful branches of endless knowledge sprouting leaves of wisdom based on hard penance and buds of compassion blossoming into flowers of righteousness, resulting in fruits of blissful joy.*

4. EMPEROR DASARATHA

Dasaratha, the ruler of the majestic city of Ayōdhya, was the king of emperors. He ruled the kingdom of Kōsala so well that he was praised in all the seven worlds. He was a personification of dharma and the father of Rāma, the hero of this great epic.

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The requisite qualities in a ruler are wisdom, compassion, tranquillity, strength, flawless heroism, a charitable disposition, justice and fair play. All these qualities served Dasaratha, while only half of them were present in other kings. In this vast world no hand was there that was not wet with the sacred water poured during the giving away of gifts by Dasaratha. Even those yāgas (sacrifices) which were prescribed by the scriptures, but which could not be accomplished by other kings, had been completed by him long ago. He was a mother to his subjects because of his love and affection for them. In granting boons to them, he was like tapas (penance). Guiding them, leading them, and taking them through the right path, he was a dutiful son. He was a panacea for all the ills of his people. He was knowledge where erudition was concerned. *Emperor Dasaratha crossed a sea of mendicants by giving them what was sought; he crossed a sea of knowledge by delving deep into countless books; he crossed the sea of enemies by destroying them with his sword; and he crossed the sea of pleasures by heartily enjoying them.* This charitable king of kings of immortal glory, who possessed a sword enclosed in a sheath of leather, could control and direct turbulent rivers, beasts, birds and even the minds of women of doubtful character. With the Cakravala hill acting as a fort wall, with the vast sea around it resembling a moat, and with several mountains looking like gem-studded palaces, the entire world appeared to Dasaratha like the beautiful city of Ayōdhya from where he ruled. His spear, blunted by constant use against foes, would wear out due to sharpening, while his golden anklets would wear out because they were rubbed by the huge, jewel-studded crowns of kings who made obeisance to him.

The royal white umbrella of Dasaratha which was stable and constant, was preferred by his subjects to the moon in the sky, which kept waxing and waning. This white umbrella brought tranquillity to all in the world and removed darkness. Leonine Dasaratha loved the lives of all worthy creatures as dearly as he loved his own. He stood like a single body containing within himself everything animate and inanimate that was present in that perfect land. From an exalted position, the victorious ruling sceptre of mountain-like broad-shouldered Dasaratha protected all beings like the sun with bright white rays seen in the sky. As there was no one living who dared to challenge him, the broad shoulders he possessed were not put to test in wars. He ruled his kingdom as zealously as a thrifty farmer would safeguard his small land-holding.

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5. INCARNATION

Paying obeisance one day to the great sage Vasishtha who was as pure and exalted as Lord Brahma, Dasaratha said, "You are the mother and the father of our ancient dynasty, our penance and the God that we reach through devotion! My forefathers have made the glory of our dynasty outshine even the sun. Among them there was no one who was not famous. With your blessings, I have vanquished my enemies and ruled this land for sixty thousand years. *I have no sorrow except that this land will suffer after I am dead, as I have no heir.* Sages and scholars in this land have so far led a good life without any strain. That these would be put to hardship when I am gone, troubles me."

On hearing the words of Dasaratha, Vasishtha, the son of Lord Brahma, recalled the assurances given to the Devas by Lord Mahāvishnu that He would destroy the Rākshasās who were indulging in killing innocent beings. Devendra, the king of the celestials, along with the other Devas had earlier approached Lord Siva and told Him about the great misery suffered by them at the hands of the Rākshasās. Lord Siva expressed His inability to destroy Rāvana, the Rākshasa king of Lanka as He (Lord Siva) had already given boons to him. However, He accompanied the Devas to the centre of Mount Meru in the north where Lord Brahma sat in a flawless gem-studded hall inside the mountain peak. They told him about the hardships suffered by them at the hands of Rāvana. Lord Brahma told Lord Siva how Meghanathan, the son of Rāvana, had captured Devendra who was later freed by Him (Brahma). Lord Siva and Lord Brahma said that the mighty, evil-minded, ten-headed Rāvana with his twenty arms could not be destroyed by them. They declared that only the dark-complexioned Lord Mahāvishnu, the ocean of mercy, could vanquish Rāvana.

The Devas instantly joined their palms and invoked Lord Mahāvishnu. He appeared before them like a huge blue cloud in a forest of lotuses, resplendent with the moon and the sun on each side, accompanied by His consort, Lakshmi, and sitting on the shoulders of Garuda. Lord Siva and Lord Brahma along with the Devas at once offered their salutations to Him and prostrated themselves at His divine feet in ecstasy. Many among the Devas were 'intoxicated' with great joy. Unaware of what they were doing, some of them danced, some of them sang and some ran hither and thither. They felt as if the Rākshasās had already been destroyed. As gracefully as a cloud descending from a golden mountain, Lord Tirumāl got down from the shoulders of

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Garuda, reached a lofty hall and sat on a lion-shaped golden seat. Lord Brahma, Lord Siva, the sages and the Devas were thrilled by the presence of Lord Tirumāl and were immensely happy to be near Him. Narrating their woes, the Devas told Lord Tirumāl, "The ten-headed Rāvana, his brothers and their hordes have forced the celestials and terrestrials to give up their penances. With the boons we granted them, they are destroying the three worlds. O red-eyed Lord, you alone can put an end to this destruction." Comforting the Devas, Lord Tirumāl with a garland of tulasi adorning His neck said, "Grieve not. I will take birth in the world as a man and relieve you of your sufferings by severing the heads of Ravāna. You, Devas, will be born as monkeys in the forests, hills and groves. With my deadly, unfailing arrows, I will demolish the Rākshasās who are endowed with boons and who lead illusory lives. For this, I shall take birth on earth as the son of Dasaratha. The deadly poisonous serpent Ādisesha and my Conch (Sankha) and Disc (Cakra) will be born as my younger brothers."

The Devas were relieved that they would be protected and saved by Lord Mahāvishnu. They danced joyously and expressed their gratitude by singing the greatness of the Lord. Devendra felt happy that all sufferings would end. Lord Brahma, Lord Siva and other celestials shouted in ecstasy, "From today our travails have come to an end." Thereafter, Lord Mahāvishnu sat on the celestial bird, Garuda, and left. Lord Brahma told the Devas, "I have already decided to take birth as Jāmbavan the king of bears. Henceforth each one of you must act as desired by Lord Māhavishnu." Devendra declared that he would take birth partly as Vāli and partly as Vāli's son, Angada. Soorya announced that he would take birth as Sugreeva, the younger brother of Vāli. Agni said that he would take birth as Neelan. Vāyu declared that he would take birth as Hanuman. All the other Devas announced that they, too, would take birth as illustrious monkeys. *Lord Siva, who had once destroyed Tripura, said that a part of Him would also belong to Hanuman.* The Devas, too, offered similar pledges. Then, Lord Siva and Lord Brahma returned to Kailāsa and Brahmaloka, their respective abodes.

Sage Vasishtha recalled all these incidents which had taken place earlier. He asked Dasaratha not to worry any longer and assured him that he could get rid of his agony, if he faultlessly completed a yāga which would bless him with sons capable of protecting the universe. Dasaratha became happy. He prostrated himself at the feet of Sage Vasishtha and said, "Can any sorrow afflict me, when I have surrendered myself completely to you? Please let me know what I should do." Sage Vasishtha replied, "Vipāndaka (who deserves to be extolled even by Lord Siva) is the son of Sage

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Kasyapa, the father of the faultless Devas and the Asuras. Vipāndaka equals his father Kasyapa in scholarship and has a son known as Sage Kalaikottu. This great sage has mastered all the arts and sciences, the laws of Manu and the eternal Védic truths. The wisdom of the great Sage Kalaikottu can only be compared to the wisdom of Lord Brahma. This sage has done great penance and has the horn of a deer on his head. He is so naive that he considers all the people of this earth to be animals. O king, if you perform a yāga with the help of this Sage Kalaikottu who has been extolled by Siva and Brahma, you will be blessed with sons."

Dasaratha fell at the feet of Vasishtha and said, "O divine one! Do let me know where to find this sage and what I should do to get his help." Vasishtha replied, "Uttānapāda, a noble king, was the embodiment of love and grace. A descendant of Manu, he was invincible. He ruled his country (Anga Nādu) so well that sorrow and evil were banished from the land. His son, Rōmapāda, later became its ruler. In that beautiful land, ruled by Rōmapāda, severe drought and famine set in and continued for a long time. In spite of the king giving gifts to scholarly sages, no rains came. King Rōmapāda consulted the great ones and sages present in his court. They advised him that a visit from Sage Kalaikottu to their land would bring rain. As the king wondered how to get the sage to his land, a group of dancers with bright foreheads, sharp black eyes, red lips and voluptuous breasts offered to bring that great sage. The king was pleased with the words of the dancers and gave them costly jewels, rich robes and other valuable gifts. He asked these women, whose shining foreheads appeared to ridicule even the crescent moon, to take up the mission.

"Taking leave of the king and covering a long distance in a chariot, these maidens put up a 'hermitage' at a distance of a yōjana from the abode of the impeccable Kalaikottu Muni (sage) who was leading an austere life. They approached the sage tactfully when his father Vipāndaka was away. Kalaikottu Muni treated these maidens as sages who had done penance. He offered them water, and welcomed them. These attractive maidens, with lips resembling red flower petals, saluted the sage and quickly left for their 'hermitage'. After a few days, they came again to Kalaikottu Muni with delicious mangoes, plantains and jackfruit. Many days went by like this. One day, these girls invited Kalaikottu Muni to their 'hermitage'. He accepted the invitation and accompanied them. In great ecstasy, they led the virtuous sage on to Rōmapāda's kingdom by constantly assuring him that their 'hermitage' was just a little ahead. As soon as Kalaikottu Muni reached the capital of that kingdom, the clouds in the sky became dark like the neck of Lord Siva and showered torrential rain which filled all

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the tanks and rivers and made them give up their desire for more water. As a result, the sugar-cane and paddy fields of the kingdom, became fertile.

"King Rōmapāda understood that all these pleasant happenings were caused by the arrival of Kalaikottu Muni. The king then covered a distance of two yōjanas, along with a group of scholarly sages and met Kalaikottu Muni who was standing like a mountain in the midst of the dancing maidens. The king fell at the feet of the sage with tears of joy and with the satisfaction that there would be prosperity in future. Looking at the women who saluted him, the king praised them for relieving him of his agony. On seeing King Rōmapāda followed by his sages, Kalaikottu Muni realised that he had been tricked into coming there. Even the Devas were now afraid of the consequences of the sage's ire, which welled up in him like a sea, but did not cross the shore. Fortunately, the king at once offered his prayers to the sage, and told him, 'We felt that only you could relieve us of our sufferings.' The sage's anger then vanished in a moment, and he blessed the king.

"Kalaikottu Muni was swiftly taken to the city in a chariot followed by erudite scholars. The rich city was tastefully decorated to welcome the sage. Accompanied by King Rōmapāda, the sage entered the palace and was made to sit on a precious golden throne. Extending flawless hospitality, King Rōmapāda gave his beautiful daughter, Sāntai, in marriage to the sage. Torrential rains drove away the scourge of famine from Anga Nādu. The kingdom enjoyed continuous bliss. Kalaikottu Muni stayed in the city and was looked after very well by the king's daughter, Sāntai!" On hearing this, Dasaratha fell at the feet of Sage Vasishta and said he would go at once and bring Kalaikottu Muni. Dasaratha got into a chariot bedecked with precious gems. The Devas were happy that their ordeals would soon end. They showered flowers on Dasaratha. Accompanied by the sound of bugles and other instruments, with music rendered by musicians called Māgatars, with the benediction of masters of the scriptures, with songs sung by women wishing him a long life, surrounded by a vast army and looking like the sun, Dasaratha marched out and reached Rōmapāda's Anga Nādu.

Learning through his informants that the famous Emperor Dasaratha had entered his territory, King Rōmapāda took his sturdy bow in his hand and with his huge army crossed a distance of one yōjana (9 miles) to welcome him. On seeing the powerful Rōmapāda preparing to receive him, Dasaratha got down from his shining golden chariot and embraced him. With his strong shoulders and sharp vél, (spear with a

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leaf-shaped head) King Rōmapāda looked at Emperor Dasaratha holding an august spear and exclaimed, "Your visit to Anga Nādu must be the result of some great sacrifice that I, or the world, made in the past." Dasaratha was then brought in a gem-studded chariot to the capital of Anga Nādu. Taking him into a hall which shone with a special type of gold known as Ādakam, and seating him on a golden throne, surrounded by dainty ladies with crimson lotus feet singing sweet and melodious songs of benediction, Rōmapāda honoured great Dasaratha, who had once redeemed the celestial world for Devendra. When the purpose of his visit was made known to Rōmapāda, he said that he would himself bring the pious Kalaikottu Muni to the city of Ayōdhya. Dasaratha then went back accompanied by his army.

After Dasaratha's departure, the powerful Rōmapāda reached the abode of Kalaikottu, offered him his salutations and exchanged greetings. When the sage asked him what had brought him there, the king sought a boon from him and said, "There is a king who is a descendant of Emperor Sibi who once weighed himself on a scale for the sake of a dove. This king, holding a spear that destroyed the might of Asuras, is virtuous and praiseworthy. He is known as Dasaratha. Please visit him in the city of Ayōdhya and return." Kalaikottu Muni granted the boon. Arranging for a swift chariot, Rōmapāda requested the sage to board it with his consort, Sāntai. Accompanied by sages, Kalaikottu Muni and Sāntai proceeded to Ayōdhya. On seeing this, Dharma and the Devas proclaimed that the arrival of Kalaikottu Muni augured the birth of Lord Tirumāl into this world, and showered flowers on him!

Messengers came to the city of Ayōdhya and announced the arrival of Sage Kalaikottu. Dasaratha was immersed in a boundless sea of ecstasy. He rose quickly and boarded a chariot to welcome the sage. There was a shower of flowers from the sky. The sound of blessings from sages was heard all over. Drums boomed and musical instruments blared. Vices were annihilated. Happy that his mountain of agony had at last been shattered to pieces, Dasaratha, the king with mighty war-drums, travelled three yōjanas and met Kalaikottu Muni, the ascetic who was the very embodiment of tapas. Wearing raiments of bark, with a deerskin upper cloth, Kalaikottu Muni looked graceful and charming. He was well-versed in the Védas and carried all the sacred articles like the umbrella, the brahmadandam and the kamandalam required for performing yāgas that could destroy the might of the Rākshasās. On seeing Kalaikottu Muni, Emperor Dasaratha, stepped out of his chariot and prostrated himself before the sage. Kalaikottu Muni, along with other sages, affectionately blessed Dasaratha who paid homage to all of them. The king then escorted Kalaikottu Muni and his consort,

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Sāntai, to the city of Ayōdhya where the thunder of drums was heard. *The simultaneous entry of Sage Vasishtha (who had conquered the vicious five senses responsible for all sins) and Sage Kalaikottu (the very embodiment of the exquisite Védas) into the royal assembly gave it a unique stature.*

Dasaratha made Kalaikottu Muni sit on a throne embedded with precious stones, and said, "O great sage, you are nobler than the noblest. You are the very incarnation of righteous penance. My ancient heritage has been elevated by your grace. *Please tell me whether the penance done by me in my previous birth has become ineffective. Must I continue to discharge the duties of reigning the kingdom?"* Kalaikottu Muni looked at Dasaratha pleasantly and said, "O king of kings, you have the guidance of the great Sage Vasishta. Your deeds are blemishless. Who in this world is comparable to you? O great king, have you not brought me here to perform the great Aswamedha yāga*?" Dasaratha replied, "I have been bearing the burden of this world for a number of years. I do not have sons who can take over my burden. I request you to bless me with children who will protect this huge world after me." Kalaikottu Muni said, "Dear king, do not worry. *Perform a yāga here and now, which will give you sons who will not only protect this world but also all the fourteen worlds."*

All the materials required for the great yāga were immediately gathered. Dasaratha bathed and entered the sacrificial hall which was impeccably constructed in keeping with Védic norms. The yāga was then performed by invoking all the sacred flames and pouring ghee and other offerings into the sacrificial fire. Twelve months later, heralded by the sound of musical instruments and the Védas, the Devas appeared in the sky. The thought that Lord Mahāvishnu's incarnation was imminent made the Devas roar for joy. Their faces bloomed like lotuses and they sent down showers of fragrant flowers. The worthy Kalaikottu Muni in the mean time poured valuable and sacred substances (which would grant progeny to King Dasaratha) into the sacrificial fire. A spirit with crimson hair and red eyes sprang from the sacrificial fire, placed a beautiful golden plate containing a nectarous ball of cooked rice on the ground and disappeared into the fire. Kalaikottu Muni then asked Dasaratha to distribute the divine 'food' properly amongst his wives. Accordingly, while conches blared, a portion of the divine 'food' was given to beautiful Kausalya who had smoky, black, thin, curly hair and a

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perfect waist. Dasaratha then gave an identical portion to Kaikeyi, the daughter of the king of Kekaya. The Devas rejoiced when Dasaratha gave another identical portion to Sumitra. In addition, he gave her what was spilt during the distribution.

Kalaikottu Muni completed the Putrakāmeshti yāga (which assures progeny) by pouring ghee and other precious offerings into the sacred fire and then conducted an Aswamedha yāga. After the Védic rites were over, Dasaratha the protector of the world, worshipped his family deity, Tirumāl, and also other deities and offered them 'Havis' (food intended for the gods). He showered distinguished seekers of truth with gold. The royal invitees were presented with kingdoms, wealth, chariots, horses and costly robes befitting their ranks. Dasaratha, then reached the bank of the Sarayu River, to the accompaniment of music from a variety of instruments. After bathing there, decorated with pearls and in the company of kings, he returned to the royal court in the shade of the royal white umbrella. Falling at the feet of Sage Vasishtha (who had once humbled even Lord Brahma), Dasaratha received his blessings and rose. Commanded by Vasishtha, Dasaratha then prostrated himself before Kalaikottu Muni, offered him homage, and said, "Through your grace alone, do I stand blessed. Is there anything greater than this that I can aspire for, even through penance? You are like my father! Thanks to you, I have attained salvation." Kalaikottu Muni was immensely pleased. He blessed Dasaratha and left for his abode with the sages who had accompanied him.

After a few days, the three wives of Dasaratha, became pregnant. Not only did their faces become extraordinarily beautiful but even their bodies, acquiring the pale colour of the moon appeared exquisite. The confinement of the three queens finally arrived. Mighty Goddess Earth became joyful. The star Punarvasu and the zodiacal constellation of Kataka (Cancer) jumped for joy because Tirumāl was to be born in that star and constellation. Supernatural beings, wise sages, the Devas and the eternal sun assembled in rows and roared for joy. Dharma rose unswervingly. *The good-natured Kausalya was delivered of a son whose complexion was that of a dark cloud, who, during pralaya, would give protection to all the worlds by containing them in His limitless belly.* The Devas, including Lord Devendra, appeared in the sky and offered their blessings with shouts of joy. The daughter of Kekaya was delivered of a son in the lagnam of Meena (Pisces) and the star Poosam. Sumitra the youngest queen gave birth to Lakshmana in the constellation of Kataka (Cancer) and star Āyilyam. Devendra along with other Devas once again filled the sky and rejoiced in ecstasy. Sumitra, the queen with irresistible eyes, brought forth another male child, Satrughna,

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in the constellation of Simha (Leo) and star Makha. Goddess Earth propped on the hood of the celestial serpent Ādisesha, danced for joy. *The Védas became happy.* The women of the celestial world rejoiced in the knowledge that the Rākshasās would soon be annihilated. The Devas ran hither and thither in sheer ecstasy.

Dancing for joy, maids rushed to the king with the happy tidings. Astrologers declared that there would be no suffering henceforth in the world. On hearing the news of the birth of his sons, Emperor Dasaratha bathed in the pleasant River Sarayu and gave away gold and paddy. Accompanied by Sage Vasishtha, and the auspicious blare of white conches, Dasaratha went and saw the beautiful faces of the princes. *He immediately directed the drummers (valluvars) to announce that no taxes would be levied for seven years and the gates of his bountiful treasury would be thrown open, for the poor to take whatever they wanted. Dasaratha also announced that all wars would be stopped forthwith. All imprisoned kings would be released and allowed to leave for their respective territories. Religious ceremonies would be conducted liberally without any shortcomings, and festivals would be arranged in all parts of the country. Dasaratha further ordered that all temples in the country be renovated, that streets where seekers of Truth lived, junctions of four roads and thoroughfares be improved, and that garlands of flowers and rows of oil lamps be provided to the temples, both in the mornings and evenings.* Hearing these announcements, the men and women of Ayōdhya were immersed in a sea of ecstasy. The citizens gave handsome presents to those who brought the news of the birth of Dasaratha's sons. *They rejoiced as if they knew that it was Lord Tirumāl Himself who was born in their land!* Unable to control their joy, the citizens sprinkled fragrant oil, sandalwood paste, scented powders and musk all over the streets of the vast city of Ayōdhya for twelve days. On the thirteenth day, Sage Vasishta decided to name the sons of Dasaratha. Lord Tirumāl (who had shown infinite compassion to the elephant, Gajendra) was named Rāma. The child born after Rāma was named Bharata. The child that was to be responsible for the destruction of the deceptive Rākshasās was named Lakshmana. The fourth child, bright and beautiful as if the red lotus had learnt from the child how to blossom, looked like a pearl incarnate. This child who would eliminate all enemies was named Satrughna. Dasaratha felt that he had no life and body apart from the incomparable Rāma, who resembled a beautiful painting where water-lilies and lotus flowers merged as one.

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Dasaratha loved Rāma dearly. The four sons of Dasaratha grew up lisping nectarous words and toddling sweetly. They resembled the sun that rose daily to remove darkness. Their voices were melodious like the notes of the four Védas. They grew up steadily removing the distress of Goddess Earth. Sage Vasishtha (resembling Lord Siva) performed all the religious ceremonies, like the tonsuring of the hair and investiture with the sacred thread (upanayanam), according to Védic rites for them. He also taught them the infinite and sacred Védas and all the arts and sciences. Learning to ride elephants, horses and chariots, mastering the art of using deadly war-weapons including bows and arrows, and all the other arts a king must know, Rāma steadily grew amidst his brothers. The sages well versed in rare and ancient scriptures, the Devas, and the people living in the city of Ayōdhya, all realised that their sufferings and misfortunes would disappear owing to the presence of these princes. They felt that there was no need for them to leave the city even for a moment. *Rāma the elder, along with Lakshmana the younger, went round the world making everyone feel that Goddess Earth had done great penance.* They went together to groves, lakes and tanks and were as inseparable as cloth and thread. *Similarly, Bharata and Satrughna, too, were inseparable and were ever moving together, even while riding horses, driving chariots and chanting the scriptures. They were like the other pair of Rāma (who has me, Kamban, as his slave) and Lakshmana.*

Valiant Rāma and his three younger brothers used to go to the groves outside the city in the mornings, stay with the noble and kind sages there until dusk, and return to Ayōdhya. *Whenever people saw these princes, they would become happy and bright like crops flourishing each time it rained.* The women of the city of Ayōdhya and their mighty men *would pray to the gods of their respective faiths, to endow them with long lives and enable them to live like Kausalya and Dasaratha..* Those who saw Rāma the unique leader whose origin even the scriptures cannot trace and Lakshmana who was always beside him, would compare the two brothers to the dark cloud and Meru the golden mountain. The divine Rāma was most courteous to the people of the city who came to him and solicitous about them. With his face shining like a red flower, he used to enquire, "What can I do for you? I hope you have no difficulties or worries. Are your wise children and wife doing well? Are they all healthy, strong and sturdy?" They in turn would bless Rāma heartily and would reply, "When we possess you as our prince, why should we worry? Let our lives and the seven worlds be ruled by you till the dissolution of this world of Brahma." *With his sacred feet worshipped by his heroic*

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younger brothers and extolled by the people of the land, Rāma, the foremost among the Trinity of Gods, lived happily in that beautiful city of Ayōdhya.

6. HANDING OVER RĀMA AND LAKSHMANA

With his royal white umbrella, with the boom of victorious drums and the blessings of sages, Emperor Dasaratha guarded the whole world. One day, when mighty Dasaratha was seated on his throne, the great Sage Viswāmitra (who had long ago created a separate world for all living beings and had threatened to create another Lord Brahma and also a world for the Devas) appeared before him. The moment he saw the sage, Dasaratha was elated. Adorned with a pearl necklace more dazzling than the rays of the sun, he at once prostrated himself at the feet of the sage. He then made the sage sit on a gem-studded golden throne. Worshipping the sage's lotus feet and saluting him, Dasaratha said, "I have been freed from my sins today! O great one, what bliss I enjoy in circumambulating you and worshipping you! Your arrival here, can only be due to the great penance performed in the past by my ancestors and not because of the austerities of my country or the good deeds done by me." Viswāmitra replied, "O holder of a victorious vél! For sages like me and for celestials, whenever we face difficulties, is there any place of refuge other than the great silvery Kailāsa mountain (which humbles all other mountains), or the ocean of milk (where Lord Vishnu resides), or Satya Loka (the abode of Lord Brahma), or the city of Amarāvati (the capital of the Devas), or the golden city of Ayōdhya (with beautiful palaces)? O Emperor Dasaratha, Devendra was once defeated by Camparāsura and lost his kingdom full of karpaga trees. Leaving their cool shade, he had to seek the protection of the shade of your incomparable royal white umbrella. Taking pity on him, you slew Camparāsura and his clan, recaptured the celestial world and gave it back to Devendra, who even now rules it." On hearing the sage's words, Dasaratha, overwhelmed with joy, looked at Viswāmitra with folded hands and said, "Please tell me what I should do now." Sage Viswāmitra replied, "I propose to conduct a yāga in the dense forest. I want you to send Rāma with me to protect the yāga from the Rākshasās." To Dasaratha, Viswamitra's words were like fire thrust into a gaping wound. *He was struck with sorrow like a blind person, who, getting back his eyesight, loses it again.* He said, "O great one! My Rāma is young. He is not trained in warfare. He should be spared. If it is your command that the yāga should be protected from the Rākshasās, I will come with you and protect it overcoming any hurdles put up even by Lord Siva, Brahma or Devendra."

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The great Sage Viswāmitra rose in anger. The Devas feared that the world would come to an end that very day. The sun disappeared from the sky. All stable things in heaven and on earth began to move. Viswāmitra's eyebrows stood straight and spread over his face. He broke into a scornful laugh and his eyes became red. There was sudden darkness in all directions. Vasishtha who sensed the mood of the great sage, requested him to be patient and asked Dasaratha, *"When good things are visiting Rāma voluntarily, do you want to prevent them? O king! Like rain waters turning into copious floods and reaching the sea, the time has come for your son, Rāma, to acquire great skills."* Accepting the advice of Vasishtha his family preceptor, Dasaratha sent for Rāma. When Rāma, accompanied by his brother Lakshmana, came there, Dasaratha presented them to Viswāmitra and said, *"You are their father as well as their incomparable mother. I am giving them to you. Please do what is good."* Viswāmitra was relieved of his anger and the consequent blemish. Taking the sons offered to him, Viswāmitra blessed Dasaratha heartily. Noble Rāma, the protector of the universe, tucked his unfailing sword in his waist, tied his truth-like quiver on his mountain-like shoulders and held his victorious bow in his left hand. *Accompanied by his brother, Lakshmana, and following Sage Viswāmitra like his very shadow, Rāma left the golden city of Ayōdhya.*

Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana reached the banks of the bountiful River Sarayu where the crooning of the swans resembled the jingling of the bells of the girls who danced in auditoriums. After crossing the fields flooded with the nectar from sugar-cane crops shaken by sturdy winds, the three stayed for the night in a grove inhabited by bees which were black, like the dark hair of attractive young women. The hilltops surrounded by low-lying clouds appeared like caparisoned elephants. Over these peaks, the sun rose in the sky while Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana crossed the River Sarayu in a boat. Finally they reached a grove from which rose a huge column of smoke as if it was a yāga made for the Devas. Rāma, who stood above everyone else, looked at the divine Viswāmitra and asked him, "What is this grove?"

7. THE SLAYING OF TĀTAKAI

Viswāmitra said to Rāma, "This is the place from where Manmatha shot flowery arrows at Lord Siva. Burnt by the furious fire emanating from Siva'a eye, Manmatha's body was destroyed like a soft piece of cloth caught in fire. The ashes of Manmatha's body were strewn here. This is known as 'Ananga Nādu'. This grove is also known

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as 'Kāma Ashrama'. The holy nature of this place is beyond description. *It is here that yōga was practised by Lord Siva who is sought by all those who are after spiritual knowledge which destroys their desires and puts an end to the cycle of birth and death."* Rāma and Lakshmana were amazed on hearing this. Then they entered the grove and were received by the sages there. After staying for the night in the grove, the three of them moved out as the sun rose in the sky. Finally they came to a desert.

The desert was so hot that there were no seasons here other than summer when the sun moving high in the sky would dry up the moisture of the land. Even the heart and eyes of Agni (god of fire) would get burnt if he ever saw or thought of this place. The desert scorched the tongue of anyone who spoke of it and even scorched the darkness that surrounded the world. The sun that rose in the morning, as well as the clouds and lightning that appeared right above the desert, were scorched. When such was the fury of the desert, what object could there be that was not burnt here? *Just as torrential rains remain unaffected by arrows and spears, just as traitors who have lost their self-respect continue to live though they should have given up their lives, this desert never gave up its heat.* Though Goddess Earth wanted to run away from the desert, she could not do so as she became inert in this place. Goddess Kāli, despite her ability to leave this desert, did not wish to get away from it as she was the goddess of this land. The chariot of the sun would move slowly over this desert, while the clouds and wind would come to a standstill.

Striking like lightning that breaks the sky in two, the rubies of Ādisesha (the king of serpents who spat fiery poison) would always endanger the eyes of those who looked at them. The red rays of these rubies would emerge from the deep cracks formed by the excessive heat in this desert as if blood was oozing from a wound in the body of Goddess Earth. A big, ravenous python would come out of its hole and roll in this desert with its mouth wide open to devour whatever was available. A roaring wild elephant, unable to endure the oppressive heat of the sun in the sky, would rush into the open mouth of such a python, seeking shelter! Crows and elephants would fall down and get scorched in this desert which could verily be called the unsurpassed kingdom of Agni!

As the desert emitted oppressive and unbearable heat reaching even the heavens, the clouds got heated, turned dark and appeared to have fallen on the land here and there. Even the heat that prevailed in the desert appeared to be aware of its intensity and seemed to feel that its vapours would rise and scorch the celestial world. Taking

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pity on the Devas, the heat appeared to convert itself into a mirage! *The desert was moistureless like the minds of wise ones, who, after conquering the effects of good and evil, reach heavenly bliss by surmounting the three formidable walls of lust, anger and greed — the three enemies of mankind; or like the minds of prostitutes who earn in gold their price for giving pleasure.* Pebbles formed by rocks due to oppressive heat were spread all over the desert which had a wide gap through which the burning rays of the sun could easily enter deep into the nether world occupied by the serpent king with his ruby hood.

Though Rāma and Lakshmana possessed unlimited powers, Viswāmitra felt that they were daintier than flowers and might not be able to withstand the heat of the desert. So he taught them two mantrās called 'Bala' and 'Atibala' created by Lord Brahma. These mantrās could prevent diseases of the body and generate physical fitness and strength without transforming the body. As soon as Rāma and Lakshmana recited these mantrās in their minds, even walking in that fierce desert (the oppressive heat of which humbled the raging fire of pralaya), became like wading through cool water! Rāma saluted the sage and asked, "Has it been scorched by the opening of the eye on Lord Siva's forehead, or is there any other reason for the utter ruin of this land which is worse than a land ruled by an accursed tyrant?" Viswāmitra replied, "Listen to the story of a demoness who possesses the might of a thousand rogue elephants. Leading the life of a killer of many sweet beings, she resembles Yama. She has the strength to displace the earth in utter rage, to drink the entire water of the sea and to smash the sky in anger. Unimaginable evil has taken a feminine form in her! Emitting pralaya fire, the body of this Rākshasi steeped in poison would appear like two huge thunderous mountains containing crescent moons combined into one. This fiendish woman has snakes for bangles, holds a spear in her hand and has the habit of staying in groves. Her name is Tātakai. *Just as the vice of greed deeply ingrained in a person destroys all other good qualities, Tātakai (the Rākshasi who is cruel beyond description), has destroyed this fertile land, and converted it into a desert.* This Tātakai carries out the commands of Rāvana, the king of Lanka. With the strength of a mountain, she obstructs my yāga. She roams about in this land killing all, without leaving any offspring. She believes that Lord Brahma created all living beings for her to eat. A few days hence, there will be no creature left! What more is there for me to say?"

Listening to Viswāmitra, Rāma holding his precious bow in the hand which was accustomed to holding the Conch, nodded his head and asked, "Where is this evil Tātakai?" Even as he spoke, Tātakai appeared before them like a black mountain

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emitting fire. The weight of her legs covered by anklets made of mountains made huge pits into which sea water flowed! Even the fiery Lord Yama was frightened of her and went into hiding in the nether world when he saw her. Her eyebrows shook in savage anger and her crescent teeth protruded at the ends of her cavernous mouth. She stared at Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana with her two fiery eyes. Raising a loud sound, she laughed with contempt. Scanning her frightening trident (stuck with heads) and grinding her teeth, she opened her wide mouth and said, "I am invincible. This place is under my command. I have already annihilated all the earlier generations. Is it because I miss dainty dishes that you have all come? Or, have you been driven here by destiny to die? Tell me!" Uttering these words, Tātakai caught hold of the clouds and squeezed them. She kicked the tall mountains in anger and reduced them to powder. She ground her frightful teeth which looked like the halves of a full moon and held her trident ready for the assault. She shrieked at Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana and said that she would hurl the trident and pierce their hearts. Viswāmitra wanted Rāma to kill Tātakai. However, noble Rāma hesitated. He wondered whether it was proper to kill a woman. Thereupon Viswāmitra said, "Tātakai has committed a number of heinous crimes. How can this embodiment of cruelty be considered a woman? It is true that killing a woman with modesty is disgraceful and will invite contempt. But Tātakai is different. The moment her name is uttered, even the might of renowned heroes vanishes. Such is her ferocity. Devendra and other celestials have run away, unable to stand before her. With shoulders of the size of the Mandara mountain, in what way is she different from men of prowess?"

Viswāmitra, the sage with boundless penance to his credit, added, "O dear sons of Dasaratha, long ago, beautiful Kiyati with kayal-like eyes, wife of the great sage Bhrigu, fell in love with mighty Rākshasās and enjoyed carnal pleasures with them. Lord Tirumāl with the Disc in His hand slew her. In another instance, the petty-minded woman Kumati, daughter of Virōcana, considered that all beings in heaven and on earth were food for her by right! She was slain by the sharp-edged Vajrāyudham of Devendra. Rāma, you must realise that even after slaying these women, Tirumāl and Devendra were only praised and not censured. O descendant of the praiseworthy Solar dynasty, even Yama considers various factors like one's destiny, span of life, and actions, before taking away one's life. Tātakai is more cruel than Yama. She wants to consume all living beings the moment she smells them! It is meaningless to think that this Tātakai is an innocent woman. I have spoken only after taking indestructible dharma into consideration; and not in anger. It is not a sign of virtue to remain calm. Show your righteous indignation. Slay this fiend." Rāma replied, "O truthful sage, I will treat your command as the Védas and implicitly

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obey. Your words are dharma to me." Spitting fire from her eyes, cruel Tātakai at once raised Yama's fiery trident and hurled it at Rāma. The shining trident advanced towards him like a planet out to devour the full moon! None could see Rāma (Tirumāl's incarnation) touch his arrow or bend his beautiful bow. But everyone saw the trident fall down in two pieces. In a split second, Tātakai conjured up a heap of stones which could fill up an ocean, and pelted Rāma with them. He stopped them with a *shower of arrows. Then he shot an arrow at Tātakai with the speed of the curse of a sage. The arrow pierced her diamond-like chest and came out as easily as the unheeded advice offered to fools by good persons!* Tātakai fell down dead as if the victorious flag of Rāvana had fallen heralding his end. The blood that flowed from her wounds resembled the red horizon released from the hold of the evening sky. The excited Devas declared that there would no longer be any obstacle for Viswāmitra's yāga. Requesting the sage to give divine weapons to Emperor Dasaratha's noble son, the Devas showered flowers on Rāma. Thus did Rāma, in his very maiden encounter, obey the commands of Viswāmitra.

8. THE YĀGA

After the Devas went away, Viswāmitra along with Rāma and Lakshmana left the desert which had become cool with the flowers showered by the Devas. *Thereafter, like the liberal words of comfort uttered by the charitable Sadayappan which acted as medicine for the disease of poverty of earthly people, divine missiles, with the mysteries of their use were given by Viswāmitra to Rāma. Like the good and noble acts of a person in this birth reaching the same person in the next birth, the arrows presented by Viswāmitra reached Rāma.* The celestial arrows 'told' him, "We have come to you and we will not leave you. *We will carry out your commands unfailingly like your brother, Lakshmana."* Rāma welcomed their offer. From then on, these arrows rendered yeoman service to Rāma.

Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana then walked on. After they had covered a distance of about two kādams (twenty miles), they suddenly heard a sound near by. Rāma wanted to know what caused the sound. Viswāmitra said, "The flowing Sarayu River springs from a tank called Mānasam and is worshipped by pious Devas. Into this great river flows River Gōmati, resulting in this sound." They proceeded further and reached the bank of another river which had the power to release all who took a dip in it from the cycle of birth and death. Rāma wanted to know the name of this sacred river. Viswāmitra replied, "In days of yore, Lord Brahma brought forth an emperor who was ever victorious and noble-minded. Like the four Védas, he had four

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sons. Their names were Kucan, Kucanābhan, Atoortan and Vasu. Kucan lived in the city of Kowsambi, Kucanābhan in the cool Mahōdayam city, Atoortan in the impeccable city of Tanmavanam, and Vasu in the city of Girivirasam. Among them, Kucanābhan was blessed with one hundred daughters who spoke sweetly with their coral lips.

"While the daughters of Kucanābhan were growing up, they went one day to a beautiful garden, accompanied by their maids. Vāyu Deva arrived there and was attracted by them. He told them, "O girls with eyes resembling tender mangoes, I am afflicted by Manmatha's flowery arrows. Please marry me." The girls told him that he could marry them after receiving their father's consent. Enraged at their reply, Vāyu Deva converted them into hunch-backed women. They crawled to their father and lisping sweetly told him all that had happened. After consoling his daughters, he got them married to king Brahmadatta, the vanquisher of ignorance and the son of noble Sage Sooli who had done great penance. As soon as Brahmadatta's delicate hands touched the girls, they lost their hunch-backs and became beautiful once more. Kucanābhan who ruled the entire land, did not have a son. He performed a yāga to beget sons. Immediately, there appeared from the yāga fire, a handsome son known as Kādi. After crowning Kādi, Kucanabhan handed the kingdom over to him and went to heaven. To that great Kādi who ruled Mahōdayam, a girl named Kowsigi was born. *After her, I was born.* Kowsigi was married to the learned Irisikan. He enjoyed wealth, happiness and a virtuous married life and then reached the feet of Lord Brahma after doing penance. Unable to bear her husband's absence, Kowsigi followed him in the guise of a river in the sky. Irisikan directed her to flow on earth to relieve the sufferings of the people in this wide world. My elder sister, Kowsigi, following the advice of her husband, has taken the form of this big river."

Rāma and Lakshmana were bewildered. They walked a short distance and arrived at a grove with a cloudy sky above. When the brothers wanted to know the history of the grove, the sage replied, "Once upon a time, along with some sages, Lord Tirumāl stayed in this grove and undertook penance. His red eyes transcend the four Védas, the Devas, and the sages. Those in heaven and on earth who recite His divine name are freed from attachment. Nobody can discern the great transformation that takes place through His magnificent illusions. We are neither competent nor qualified to know what the pure Tirumāl has in His mind. He stayed here for aeons and did great penance. In the mean time Mahābali (an Asura who was as mighty as the fierce-toothed Lord Varāhamurti) conquered both heaven and earth, bringing them under his control. Thereafter, Mahābali attempted to perform a yāga which even the

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Devas were incapable of. He planned to give gifts of land and other worthy articles to sages and saints during the yāga. Learning of this, the Devas came here, prostrated themselves before the elusive Tirumāl, and requested him to put an end to the 'harsh' deeds of 'evil' Mahābali. Agreeing to do so, the tall, blue-complexioned Tirumāl took birth as the son of the all-knowing sage, Kasyapa, and his wife Aditi. The form he chose was that of a dwarf.

"Wearing a yagnōpavitam (three strands of thread) across his chest and a cord made of twisted grass around his waist, Tirumāl took the guise of a scholarly dwarf, Vāmana (whom only exceptional seers could recognise), and went to attend Mahābali's yāga. Mahābali received him with honour and told him, 'O repository of all noble qualities, there is no brahmin greater than you, nor is there anyone worthier than I, who could welcome you.' On hearing this, the omniscient Vāmana extolled Mahābali as one possessing hands which were gifted with much more than what one desired to receive from them. Vāmana added, 'Those who have come to you are great; those who have missed coming to you are not.' Listening to Vāmana's words, Mahābali became happy and asked Vāmana, 'What can I do for you?' Vāmana replied, 'You are a mighty adversary to your foes! If you have compassion for me, give me land equal to three of my strides.' 'Granted!' said Mahābali. His preceptor, Sukrācārya intervened and said, 'O lord! Realise the truth. The dwarf-like figure with the complexion of a cloud, whom we now see through our eyes is a deceptive one. He is none other than Tirumāl who once created this and other worlds.'

"Mahābali replied, *'When I give away a gift with my hands raised aloft and below them find the outstretched palms of Lord Tirumāl, who has momentarily lowered His stature to receive the gift from me, can there be anything greater happening to me? Once noble and scholarly persons have announced and come forward to offer gifts to all, it is wrong for them to discriminate one from another among those who have come to receive. Tell me who is worthier than Vāmana to receive charity. You have spoken only through ignorance. If eminent or deserving persons ask for anything, the only thing to be done is to give. While it is bad to accept a gift, it is great to give one, even if the gift is one's own life. You are like my father. Please realise that the dead are not really dead if they have done charity. Those who are alive, but stretch out their hands to seek alms, are as good as dead. Except those who have given alms, who are there in this world who are really immortal? Those who cause us irreparable damage are not the ones who are our real enemies. The real enemies are those who prevent charitable*

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persons from offering gifts. Such enemies ruin themselves. There is no evil deed worse than preventing a person from doing an act of charity. To those who grant gifts, the real enemies are the obstructors, who, being close to those philanthropists, advise them to be miserly. O evil obstructor of charities, is it fair on your part, as my preceptor and minister, to stand in my way, even as I am about to hand over the gift sought from me? Because of this act of yours, your own kith and kin will be denied food and clothing.'

"Totally disregarding the words of his minister, Sukrācārya, Mahābali told Vāmana, 'Take for yourself the land sought by you.' Then Mahābali poured sacred water on Vāmana's hands. As soon as the pure water from the vessel touched the hands of the dwarf (Vāmana), he began to grow gigantic and rose to the sky like the help rendered to noble ones! Those who looked at the growing form of Vāmana, initially marvelled at the sight but later became frightened. One sacred foot of Vāmana fixed firmly on the ground began to measure the whole world. The other foot measured the celestial world. Both the terrestrial and celestial worlds fell short of the two divine feet. As there was no space left for the third step, Mahābali offered his head. Vāmana who grew tall as Trivikrama, put his foot on the head of Mahābali and pressed him down into the earth. Tirumāl who appeared as Vāmana, gave Devendra the worlds gifted to Him by Mahābali, and then returned to the ocean of milk. His two divine feet, red with measuring the worlds, were fondly caressed by Goddess Lakshmi and relieved of their strain. Thereafter, He slipped into divine sleep (yōga nidra) on Ādisesha, His bed." After concluding his narration, Viswāmitra added, "Dear Rāma, because Tirumāl did penance here, whoever sets eyes on this grove will be freed from the cycle of birth and death. This is the ideal place for me to conduct the yāga." Walking along that beautiful grove, Viswāmitra gathered the necessary materials and began the yāga, with the graceful sons of Dasaratha standing guard.

After Rāma and Lakshmana had kept watch for six days over the yāga performed by Viswāmitra for the welfare of the Devas, Rāma, the elder of the two, going round the sacred fire, went to the learned Viswāmitra and asked, "O exalted sage, when will these Rākshasās, who have been indulging in wicked deeds, appear before me?" As Viswāmitra had undertaken a vow of silence, he did not answer Rāma's query. Saluting the sage, Rāma came out and looked at the sky. Suddenly, like water-laden clouds appearing during the rainy season, the Rākshasās came with a thunderous roar. They shot arrows, threw spears, uprooted big hillocks, and showered abusive words. The weapons thrown by them covered the entire forest

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like a downpour of heavy rain. Like fishes from a tidal sea jumping high and hiding the sky, the army of Rākshasās screened the sky. "These are the cruel Rākshasās, Sage Viswāmitra spoke of," said Rāma to Lakshmana. With great rage and shedding fire from the corner of his eyes, Lakshmana looked at the Rākshasās, the sky, and the bow in his hand. He then saluted Rāma and told him, "O Lord of the Devas, here and now, you will see pieces of their bodies falling down to earth." The lotus-eyed Rāma, fearing that the flesh and blood of the Rākshasās might fall on the sacred yāga fire, erected a canopy of arrows over the sacrificial enclosure. There was a time when the most deadly poison called Hālahāla rose from the ocean of milk to kill everyone. Seeing this, the Devas had trembled with fear and sought the help of Lord Siva. Similarly, all the sages who dreaded the violent Rākshasās now sought the help of the dark-complexioned Rāma. He comforted them and assured them of protection. Unleashing an arrow from his mighty bow, Kōdandam, Rāma converted the earth into a sea of Rākshasa blood and created a hill out of their severed heads. *The arrows dispatched by Rāma, pushed Mārica, one of the two sons of the frightful Tātakai, into the sea, and sent the other son, Subāhu, to the kingdom of Yama.*

The rest of the Rākshasās, telling each other that Rāma and Lakshmana would soon walk over the mountains of corpses to catch them, took to their heels. Rāma's deadly arrows, however, followed the fleeing Rākshasās and attacked them. As a result, the headless trunks of the Rākshasās twitched and danced. The fiends which came to devour these corpses, sang in praise of Rāma! Vultures and other birds, gathered in great numbers over the battleground and formed a 'canopy'. The rain of flowers showered on Rāma and Lakshmana by the Devas, pierced the 'canopy' and fell on the ground. The boom from the Devas' drums of victory resembled the sound of thunder from the clouds. Devendra and other celestials assembled in the sky, saluted Rāma and blessed him. Sages who had done sacred penance, greeted Rāma and Lakshmana and showered flowers on them. The trees of the forest, too, showered flowers. Viswāmitra told happy Rāma, "It is my great and unique fortune that you — who created the worlds and kept them in your belly during the period of the great deluge — should have saved my yāga. *I will not consider the protection given by you as a great feat for you."* When Rāma, the son of Kausalya, solicited his commands for further work, Viswāmitra replied, "There are many great deeds that await you. You can complete them later. Janaka the king of prosperous Mithila is performing a yāga. Let us go to Mithila and watch it."

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9. AHALYA

Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana reached the banks of the River Sōnai which resembled a woman with ornaments made of precious gems cleansed with water; a woman who smeared her breasts with the fragrant paste of sandalwood and aquila; a woman who possessed a tender creeper-like waist with fresh flowers covering her girdle , with her hair resembling black sand; a woman whose ankle-bells were streams surrounding the hills. By then the golden-rayed sun as if wanting to ensure a cool morning the next day, had moved and dipped into the western sea in his chariot driven by horses which ran faster than his vision. The three (Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana) entered a grove full of fragrant flowers.

The next morning, the sun that protects the world and removes deadly darkness, rose from the dark sea, like the first big lotus flower which shot up along with Lord Brahma from the dark navel of handsome Tirumāl. Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana, looking like the Trinity of Gods, moved out of the grove. *On the way, they saw the waves dashing against the banks of River Ganga which had brought in its flow, nectar-shedding konrai flowers from the tuft of Lord Siva, as a result of which, it looked like River Kāveri!* Finally they reached the region of Mithila with its fertile tracts of arable land where herons had just woken up from paddy-fields abounding in lotuses. These herons, mistaking the shadows of the deceptive sword-like large eyes of the peasant women (removing weeds from the flowing water) for kayal fish, tried to peck them with their beaks, and felt ashamed when they realised their folly. In the groves of Mithila, water that was impounded produced the sound of drumbeats. Asoka trees blossomed and sparkled. The nectar trickling from fragrant flowers, appeared like the strings of the yāzh. The musical hum of the bees in the flowers made peacocks rise and dance. The sight of women with cool, bright foreheads, drove men (who desired to possess them) to desperation. Peasants working in the fields weeded and threw away black lilies which fell on the round lotuses in the tank, and looked like the beautiful eyes of those women.

In that land of Mithila, male swans mistook beautiful women with melodious koel-like voices for female swans, because of their graceful walk, and followed them. The tanks were replete with water where water-birds embraced each other and played. The rivers in Mithila had floods not of cool water, but of milk flowing

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in streams from the udders of buffaloes, of the juice of mangoes from the tall mango trees on the banks of the rivers, of the juice of sugar-cane crushed in factories, and of honey oozing from broken honeycombs! Maidens with waists thinner than yarn, with breasts like hilltops, and eyes as cool as rain, danced on stages to the beat of drums. Stout young buffaloes frightened by the sound, ran , fell into streams and made them muddy. As a result, the vālai fish in the water jumped onto the adjacent coconut trees. Delicate women took a dip in the bountiful tank-water closing their long, sharp eyes. Later, they surfaced like Goddess Lakshmi rising from the ocean of milk. The jingle of their bangles, while they played in the water, synchronised with the chirping of the water-birds. Swarms of bees burrowed into the fragrant flowers in the tanks. Such was the land of Mithila which Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana happily approached. When they reached the outskirts of the beautiful city, they saw a black stone lying on a mound. As soon as the dust of Rāma's sacred feet touched the stone, it came to life. *Like someone who, after attaining spirituality and reaching the divine feet of the Lord, is relieved of the illusion of ignorance, Ahalya stood there in her earlier human form.* Viswāmitra told Rāma, "This woman is Ahalya, the wife of Sage Gautama who punished Devendra for having misbehaved with the wife of another." Listening to Viswāmitra, Rāma asked, "Why was Ahalya subjected to this humiliation? Was it because of sins committed in her previous birth or the present one?" Viswāmitra replied, "Once upon a time, Devendra was looking for an opportunity to meet the doe-eyed Ahalya. One day, managing to get Gautama out of the hermitage, he entered it in the guise of the sage, and succeeded in his lustful intentions. Though Ahalya realised that it was not her husband who was with her, she willingly responded to Devendra's overtures. Meanwhile Sage Gautama suddenly returned to the hermitage. Ahalya, by then sullied for ever, stood frightened. Shivering, Devendra took the form of a cat and tried to escape. But Gautama caught him, and like an unfailing arrow, cursed him that thousands of female pudenda should appear all over his body. Devendra thus transformed, left the place in shame. Next, Sage Gautama cursed Ahalya that she should turn into a stone. Ahalya who became a black stone, prayed to the sage, 'O Siva-like Lord, it is the duty of elders to bear with the failings of lesser persons.' Gautama replied, 'You shall regain your human form when the dust from the divine feet of Rāma falls on you.' This is what happened. After your incarnation, no being has suffered. Instead, all beings in this world have been relieved of their afflictions. *O Rāma, possessing a cloud-like complexion, when you fought the collyrium-coloured Tātakai, I saw the glory of your hands. Here I have seen the glory of your feet."*

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After listening to all that the faultless Viswāmitra had to say, the dark-complexioned Rāma possessing divine feet, turned to Ahalya and said, "Serve great Sage Gautama in such a manner that you receive his grace. Do not be sad about the sufferings you have undergone." Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana then went to the hermitage of Sage Gautama and met him. Viswāmitra told Gautama, "When the divine feet of dark Rāma touched slim-waisted Ahalya, she stood up at once restored to her human form. Please take back Ahalya whose heart is pure." Sage Gautama, the equal of Brahma, accepted the advice of Viswāmitra. The charitable Rāma, exalted by his virtues, saluted the divine sage and circumambulated him. After bringing Ahalya and Sage Gautama together, Rāma, accompanied by the great Viswāmitra and Lakshmana, left the fragrant grove. Traversing some distance, they saw the wall of the gem-studded city of Mithila.

10. THE CITY OF MITHILA

The well-guarded city of Mithila seemed to proudly announce, "Because of my great penance, Goddess Lakshmi is born here." The city appeared to lift and wave its beautiful hands to welcome the lotus-eyed Rāma. The flags fluttering in rows over the prosperous mansions in the city, moved like the celestial dancers welcoming Rāma. Flags of cloth flying on house-tops got drenched when clouds passed over them but dried out when the smoke of aquila went up like clouds. In the evenings, with the fading of the rays of the sun, the sky looked like the ocean of milk. Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana saw all this.

Wanting to draw a portrait of the divine figure of Seeta, Manmatha had taken a brush, dipped it in nectar and tried in vain. *As this beautiful Seeta whom even Manmatha could not portray was born here, the city looked like the red lotus where Goddess Lakshmi used to dwell.* Glittering with gems, Mithila's roads looked like the sea bereft of water (after Agastya drank it up) during the day, and like the sky shining with stars, at night. Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana walked through these broad roads scattered with golden ornaments thrown from houses during lovers' tiffs between men and women possessing arched eyebrows. In places, these majestic roads also appeared like dark rivers due to the torrential rutting fluid of the fearless huge elephants capable of breaking down even iron rods. The dark colour at times vanished and the roads became white, because of the white rivers formed by the froth from the mouths of bridled horses. The roads again became muddy due to the chariots driven on them. Later, with many chariots continuously moving on the roads, the muddy

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roads dried up and became dusty. Such were the roads on which Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana walked.

In Mithila, husbands and wives loved each other with the same fervour, and were equal partners in enjoying life. The nectar-shedding garlands thrown on the roads by young girls, during feigned quarrels, swarmed with bees. As Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana traversed these roads in the city of Mithila, they saw people playing sweet tunes, as melodious as the lisping of children, on the makarayāzh. The music was brought out by strumming strings smeared with ghee. Dancers with invisible waists, danced so deftly in the golden dance-halls, that their eyes moved as swiftly as their hands. Girls went up and came down (like the cycle of birth and death) in swings which were tied to green arecanut trees. These girls swang with such abandon that they captivated the minds of the males! *Like the River Kāveri flowing between its two banks*, the markets had immeasurable stocks of gems, gold, pearls, tails of deer, logs of aquila, peacock feathers, and ivory stacked in heaps on either side. *Women with tender fingers and sharp nails, played on the yāzh. They tightened the strings, kept their minds and fingers steady, and with a smile on their faces sang melodious songs.Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana drank in this sweet music. They saw bridled horses running around with the speed of a potter's wheel, galloping as steadily as the friendship of the learned, and moving with the loftiness of the incomparable exalted knowledge of philosophers.* The sage and the brothers saw two mighty elephants with ivory tusks as sturdy as diamonds, and emitting fire through their red eyes, fighting with each other like two mountains. The two were like an intimate couple, attacked by the arrows of Manmatha and engaged in love-making, resorting to temporary discord for attaining heightened pleasure.

Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana saw the rising of full 'moons' (the faces of maidens) through the windows of mansions provided with sharp-edged spikes and impeccable gems, set in rows. Drinking fresh wine in glass cups, inebriated women would laugh artificially and talk incoherently, but would eventually blurt out everything in their state of intoxication. Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana saw not only the beautiful lotus faces of several of these women but also the gambling dens of women (with long vél-like eyes), where the stakes used were bangles, ear-rings, gem-studded garlands, costly thin-laced clothings and the yāzh. These women while gambling would move the marbles with such speed that their beautiful hands would become red. *The gambling discs would revolve with the speed with which*

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the petty minds of men moved in different directions pushed by their five senses! These gambling discs, coming into frequent contact with the breasts of women would emit the sweet scent of sandalwood paste. Young men with wealth and education would also gamble in these dens! In Mithila, Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana saw crowds of radiant, charitable, young men giving whatever was sought. These men were as handsome as Manmatha was, before he was burnt by the fury of Siva's fiery eye. With bows in their valiant hands, they possessed red hair as a result of falling at their beloveds' feet which were smeared with the paste of flowers! Women as beautiful as peacocks and as slender as creepers, would exchange sweet words with parrots while plucking flowers in the groves. These women were so charming that they could put even celestial women to shame. The sight of the swans vanquished by the graceful gait of the women of Mithila would make the bees hum. The reflection of rows of mansions, near King Janaka's golden palace, could be seen in the moat which surrounded the palace like the River Ganga.

The glitter of gold, the pleasing scent of flowers, the sweet taste of nectar drawn by bees from exotic flowers, the pleasure of hearing a beautifully composed poem —. all these combined in Seeta! Looking at Seeta in the balcony meant for maidens, Viswāmitra, Rāma and Lakshmana stood near the palace. All, including Lord Brahma, would cite only Goddess Lakshmi for comparison while extolling women. When that Goddess Herself had come as Seeta, who could we compare Seeta with? Even Uma Devi and other celestial women raised their hands over their heads in homage to Seeta who was endowed with all lovable qualities including patience. The people of the earth who had seen the beauty of Seeta's complexion, felt sad they did not have eyes that did not blink as they could not see the full extent of this beauty. The celestials were disappointed that even though they had eyes that did not blink, their two eyes were inadequate to have a full measure of Seeta's beauty. Seeta had beautiful roving eyes which vanquished the eyes of the doe, pushed the victorious vél and the sword into the background, and overpowered and frightened the kayal fish. *Beside the nectar yielded by the ocean of milk, Seeta appeared like nectar offered by the world from this balcony. If it were possible for Lord Brahma to create another woman like Seeta whose spoken words were as sweet as honey, He would have done that. What could even the ocean of milk give again to the celestials except the same old nectar? Can the ocean of milk ever create another Seeta?*

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Devendra and others who ruled the celestial world, sought scintillating heavenly women like Menaka who had eyes as sharp and bright as a vél. Even these women grieved that they did not have Seeta's divine complexion which was like sunlight before their complexion resembling the cool full moon. *One does not know what made Goddess Lakshmi leave her flowery abode and stay on earth as good-natured Seeta! Was it because of the long penance done by countless brahmins? Or, was it due to dharma, or the terrestrial world, or the celestial world, or the Devas? We do not know!* Incomparably beautiful maids, who sprinkled flowers for Seeta to walk on, addressed her in several ways with words like, 'O mother with creeper-like slender hands!' and 'O honey-like mother as precious as nectar which is hard to get !' These maids wore exquisite bells around their slender ankles. Resembling flowery creepers, they wore gem-studded ornaments, garlands and golden belts around their waists. Still, they longed to see the graceful beauty of Seeta, who in their midst looked like the queen of 'lightning' worshipped by millions of streaks of 'lightning'! *Seeta had proud eyes which could vanquish even killers like Yama and the vél. She was the very embodiment of femininity.* Her posture when she stood firmly (when hills at a distance, walls near by, mighty stones and even grass melted at the very sight of her) was beyond description. *Beautiful women who gave pleasure to the lustful eyes of men obtained pleasure by looking at Seeta who was intensely loved by them. Though ornaments like ear-rings and necklaces were in use and had adorned women long before the incarnation of Seeta, it was only after Seeta was born and had worn them that these ornaments really attained beauty.*

When Seeta (with her extraordinary beauty transcending the comprehension of the human mind) stood on the balcony of the palace, Rāma gazed at her and she gazed at him. Their eyes interlocked, each pair trying to swallow the other. Their steady minds reeled, moved and became one. Two sharp véls, Seeta's eyes, pierced Rāma's mighty shoulders. Rāma's red-eyed gaze countered the 'attack' by resting on Seeta's breasts. Their consuming looks gave rise to an attachment, which was so deep and strong that it drew the sturdy Rāma carrying a bow and the fair Seeta possessing sword-like eyes, into each other's hearts. *Waistless Seeta and blemishless Rāma, with two different bodies, were united as one life. Where was the need to exchange words, when Lord Tirumāl and Goddess Lakshmi, separated from the dark serpent bed on the ocean of milk, reunited here as Rāma and Seeta?* Seeta, looked like a painted beauty when her eyelids stopped blinking. Viswāmitra walked on followed by Rāma who in

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turn was closely followed by Seeta's mind, determination and beauty. Finally, at one stage, Seeta's eyes could no longer see him. *As Rāma, the wearer of fragrant garlands, vanished from sight, Seeta's mind behaved like a rutting elephant that gets out of control when the elephant-goad (Seeta's determination) becomes ineffective. As a result, Seeta lost her shyness and other feminine qualities. Intoxicated with love, her body and mind became thin like her slender waist. The malaise of love which entered through her long and pretty eyes, affected her like yoghurt curdling the milk! She became dejected, and would not disclose her growing pangs of love to anyone. She silently suffered and languished. Adding fuel to fire, Manmatha directed his arrows into her heart at this stage.*

Seeta, whose vél like eyes extended up to her ear-rings, wilted, like a flower-creeper thrown into fire, allowing her curly hair and dress to get loosen and slip. She lost her power of speech and even her consciousness! Like the ocean of milk which gave away all it had when it was churned by the Devas, Seeta, too, lost everything and became poorer. The ornaments worn by her became loose and slipped. She was bereft of her abounding shyness. Her complexion changed. Attacked on her breasts by the arrow of love, like a deer struck by a hunter's arrow, Seeta suffered from pangs of love. On seeing this, the maids took Seeta into the palace. With her kayal-fish-like long eyes touching her circular ear-rings, with her sacred feet resembling creepers, with her divine hands soft as pollen dust, Seeta was placed by the maids on the flowery bed which was as cool as dewdrops.

Pearly tears from her long eyes fell on her breasts like raindrops falling on mountain peaks. The heat of her sighs, like the smoke from the forge of a blacksmith, dried the excessive sweat that drenched her forehead. Seeta was like a peacock wounded by an arrow released from the hands of a cruel hunter in a forest. The fire of love burnt her already raging mind. As a result, she fell on her flowery bed. Because she was being burnt by the fire of love, the fragrant flowers spread on her bed lost their softness and began pricking her body. The sandalwood paste on her body flaked off like roasted puffed-rice (pori). The threads used for linking her ornaments snapped. Maids, nurses and elderly women surrounding her, grieved over her condition. Unable to understand the cause of her affliction, they tried to remove the effect of 'evil eyes' by waving a flower-strewn platter of red water around her face and performing 'ārati'. Later, they fanned her gently. *This only resulted in*

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fanning her flame of love. The ornaments and garlands she wore got singed and turned black. Seeta looked like a golden doll melting in fire.

Seeta was heard saying that Rāma's hair was like a dark forest adorned with a garland, that his two shoulders were mighty pillars or emerald mountains, that his eyes were red lotus flowers and that his whole figure was a dark cloud that descended from heaven along with the rainbow. Suffering from the pangs of love, Seeta started prattling, "The bow of this mighty hero who has performed great deeds like consuming my life, penetrating into my mind, shattering its firmness and demolishing my feminine qualities, is not the bow made of sugar-cane.* Therefore this person cannot be Manmatha! Maiden as I am, after seeing this noble lord, my natural beauty, and my inborn shyness and innocence have left me. *This young man whom I found walking — putting his divine feet to trouble — appears to be a thief who has slyly entered my mind through my eyes. It is not his shining bluish dark hair, nor his moon-like face, nor his long hands and handsome diamond-like shoulders that sap my life; even before these, it was his sweet smile that consumed me!* What has impressed me most is not his broad, bright and captivating chest, or his proud lotus feet. It is only his majestic and beautiful gait that still lingers in my mind. On deep scrutiny, I find that he is not from the celestial world because his red lotus eyes blink. Holding a sturdy bow in his hand, and wearing the sacred thread across his chest, he can only be a prince. I am willing to give up my life for this young man who has demolished my inborn feminine qualities and the firmness of my mind. If only I can have the pleasure of seeing him again! Will it happen?"

While Seeta was talking to herself, she imagined that she saw Rāma in front of her. As a result, she began crying out, *"He stood here!"* and *"He left this place!"* Affected severely by the pangs of love, Seeta started brooding over many things one after another in a confused state of mind. The fire of love in her had become so intense that it could scorch even the hot sun. Unable to bear Seeta's excessive heat, the sun trembled and hurriedly dipped into the western sea. To Seeta, the chirping of birds simulated the beating of drums, the sound of the waves was like the sound of the dancing bells, the crimson sky appeared like blood, and darkness that brought forth the disease of love looked like a black robe. All these together seemed like a spectre

** Manmatha (the god of love) is credited with shooting flowery arrows of love from a bow made of sugar-cane.*

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to her on that evening. The southern breeze became hot by passing through fire-like ponds and acted like poison mixed with the fragrance of flowers. Finally the breeze, like a spear, pierced the wounds inflicted on Seeta by the arrows of Manmatha. *Seeta who was already in a sorrowful state of mind, having lost her feminine qualities, looked at the onset of evening which had come as if to kill her and wondered whether it was Yama!*

The darkness of evening, which was like Rāma's complexion, descended on Seeta. She wondered, *"Is it the sea, or the cloud, or the full sapphire stone, or the fragrant dark flower, or is it the lily, or the blue lotus, or the black kuvalai flower? Which is the object that consumes the lives of women subjected to innumerable ordeals?"* Seeta said aloud, "O hooded cobra, coming in the guise of evening with stars for teeth and the red horizon for a poison pouch! Why do you surround me with hostility when Manmatha is already shooting arrows at me in succession? After all I have only one life which if I lose, I will not get again. Have you any grudge against me which prompts you to take away the life that has survived the attack of Manmatha? Do you want to earn the sinful blemish of killing a woman?" Seeta continued in a perplexed mood, "Is this darkness (inflicting extreme hardship on the lovesick) the spread of cruel Hālāhala poison all over the world, or the dark overflowing pralaya sea? Or is it the blue-complexioned Tirumāl Himself pervading all? Or is it the black colour of Yama, mixed with collyrium, painted over the sky and the earth?" Looking at the nightingale, Seeta bemoaned, "My lord who appeared before my eyes has suddenly disappeared. I do not find anyone who can prevent this from happening. Is it Manmatha who taught you these deceptions, or is it the outcome of my sins in a previous birth that has brought you as a love-bird to harass me?" When Seeta was wailing thus, the maids, fearing that the bright lamps might give out more heat, removed these lamps lit with ghee kept in a moonstone mound, and replaced them with lamps set with gems which, without being kindled, converted night into day.

Long ago, the mighty Tirumāl had churned the ocean of milk from which drops and gems made their appearance like stars in the sky. Finally a golden pot, full of the nectar of immortality had emerged. Like this golden pot, the white moon rose that night from the black sea, resembling the rising of the lotus flower from Tirumāl's ocean-like navel. After the moon rose, the sky was adorned with a row of bright stars. The rays of the moon absorbed blocks of the omnipresent darkness. These rays

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branching out from the white moon, looked like leaves branching out from a tender arecanut tree placed in a silver pot kept on a high pedestal in the eastern horizon. One wondered what harm these cool rays would do to parrot-like Seeta! *Like the fame of Sadayappan of fertile Tiruvennainallur with bountiful water, the cool rays of the moon spread everywhere, and swallowed the earth, the heavens and all the eight directions! As if to renovate the world that had become old, the moon rose from the vast sea, used the bright moonlight for lime and* 'white-washed' it! With the advent of the moon, the fragrant lotus (the willing abode of Goddess Lakshmi) shrank and lost its fragrance, and the swarm of bees deserted the flower. *At the same time, the red lily bloomed like the king of a small land who would put on airs after the demise of a mighty emperor who had till then ruled the entire world with his royal sceptre.*

Cursing the moon, Seeta said, "O white flame born out of the ever-increasing dark-complexioned fire known as darkness which can swallow the entire world! You have become an enemy to that sea full of waves pining away beyond the boundaries of the world, defeated in its complexion by that elusive lord (Rāma)! You have become an enemy also to me, the sufferer of pangs of love. Rising from the dark blue sea, you were neither cruel nor were you in the habit of killing anyone. Born from the ocean of milk along with the nectar of immortality and Goddess Lakshmi, how can you harass me?" The white cluster of the moon's rays fell like a hammer on Seeta's soft breasts. Suffering like a white swan which has fallen into a huge fire, she rolled on the flower bed. The all-pervading rays of the moon attacked her, burning her body, weakening her mind and throwing her on the bed. *Like the red lotus flowers scorched by the heat of her body, Seeta was scorched by the heat of the rays of the moon!* Her companions smeared fragrant sandalwood paste continuously over her soft breasts. As the paste dried, she became hotter. Even when they fanned her, she felt the heat. Is there any medicine in this world for the disease of love? The fire of love raging in the body of Seeta scorched her soft bed laid with fragrant flowers and creepers. Her companions who loved her like a mother, replaced the scorched bed with a fresh bed made of flowers. Despite changing the flowery bed two thousand times, the heat in her body persisted. Swan-like Seeta suffered thus from the pangs of love, lying on the fragrant flower-bed laid in the beautiful maidens' apartment.

Let us narrate what happened to Rāma who had seen the shining, graceful face of Seeta, resembling lightning. Going past the maidens' apartment, Viswāmitra

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along with Rāma and Lakshmana met king Janaka who escorted them to a lofty golden palace which appeared to touch the sky. After Viswāmitra and Lakshmana went to their chambers, *Rāma became one with solitude and Seeta, along with the moon and the night that surrounded him.* Afflicted like Seeta with love pangs, Rāma said to himself, "Has the lightning that emerged from the clouds taken the form of this extraordinarily beautiful damsel? When I attempt to think, I am unable to visualise any other form. I see her in my two eyes as well as in my thoughts. The eyes of that damsel are like the ocean of milk where Lord Tirumāl rests. She now dwells in the lotus of my heart making me wonder whether she is Goddess Lakshmi who dwells in the red lotus! Yearning for this merciless woman, I have been swallowed by her through her eyes, which emit 'poison' leading to the frightening ailment known as 'love'. As a result, all things in the world appear to my unsettled mind and eyes only as reflections of her golden image. Her breasts, resembling golden urns covered with garlands, have not yet pressed my ordinary chest; yet I wonder whether there will ever come another chance for me to see that moon, that face with a mouth as beautiful as the red kovvai fruit and a smile as bright as moonlight. That damsel, who is always in my mind, has become a Yama to me. Her two eyes are like long swords. Her full breasts and the smile reaching out to me sap my life. *Does Yama need all these weapons to kill me?* Struck by the volley of arrows shot by Manmatha, when even I am made to brood constantly over this golden girl, can anyone else retain his masculine strength? Like the overflowing ocean of milk, the all-pervading moonlight is trying to corrode my life which now exists only because of the thought of this fine woman. Is there a white poison (the moon) in this world? *Can my mind ever take a wrong path? I am sure, the reason for my falling in love with this damsel with golden bangles, can only be because she is a virgin princess !"*

Like the bright royal umbrella collapsing at the end of its tenure, like the maiden of the west losing her blemishless jewel from her shining young forehead, the moon finally dipped into the sea. While Rāma suffered from the pangs of love, the red hot sun, as though to reduce Rāma's agony and brighten his lotus face, rose from the eastern mountain. With the return of her husband from the battlefield in great ecstasy, the shrivelled body of a chaste wife (separated from him for some time) becomes lustrous. Similarly, on the arrival of the sun, the lotus flowers in the tanks, bloomed. The celestial beings sang countless hymns and the sages and the exalted ones offered worship with folded hands. *The red rays of the sun, resembling Lord Siva's third eye, now spread everywhere like Lord Siva's matted locks.* Rāma had

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given up his Disc which could kill his enemies. Instead, he now handled the diamond-like sturdy bent bow Kōdandam. Unable to secure Seeta, Lord Tirumāl (Rāma), who used to sleep in the ocean of milk on Ādisesha on whose thousand hoods a thousand ruby lamps glittered, now slept only in an ocean of agony. With the caressing of his sacred feet by the soft hands (tender rays) of the rising sun, Rāma saw the shores of the nocturnal sea. As the night came to an end like the end of an age, Rāma got up from his sleep. After performing his daily rituals, he prostrated himself at the feet of Viswāmitra. Accompanied by the great sage and his pleasant brother, Rāma reached King Janaka's palace.

Followed by the sound of war-drums from all sides, Janaka entered his tall palace which touched the moon, and sat in a hall set with precious gems. The greatly respected Viswāmitra sat next to Janaka. By the side of the sage were the well-built Rāma, wearing a fresh garland and holding his bow and his younger brother, Lakshmana. King Janaka who was sitting in the hall feasted his eyes on Rāma and Lakshmana, the handsome scions of a noble family. Paying obeisance to Viswāmitra, Janaka wished to know who the princes were. Viswāmitra replied, "These are the sons of Emperor Dasaratha. *They have come to see your yāga as well as Lord Siva's bow."* Then Viswāmitra began narrating the greatness of Rāma and Lakshmana.

11. RĀMA'S ANCESTRY

Viswāmitra told Janaka, "Who does not know Manu, the first king of the Solar dynasty? He was known by the name of Vivasuvān. The noble Bridhu who protected all beings from hunger and made milk flow from the breasts of Mother Earth with his mighty bow, was a descendant of this dynasty. To enable persons like me to see the effulgent Lord Tirumāl, the Universal Healer, it was Ikshvāku who did penance before Lord Brahma for a long time and brought Him to this world in a divine chariot. Not to know Ikshvāku of this dynasty is to know nothing. Devendra had once asked Puranjeyan whether he could sever the heads of Asuras whom he could not defeat, and restore Devaloka to him. Puranjeyan immediately took his bow, and fought the Asuras. This Puranjeyan is an ancestor of these boys. Devendra had in the guise of a bull carried Puranjeyan during the fight. I cannot adequately praise the glory of the kings who succeeded Puranjeyan. After churning the ocean of milk, Nimi gave the celestials and their leader, Devendra, the nectar of immortality which could prevent

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hair from turning grey and skin from shrivelling. *This Nimi, also, sprang from the Solar dynasty to which these two youngsters of few words and great fame belong.*

"Countless in number, the royal predecessors of these princes with rare human qualities, ruled the three worlds with their shining sceptres. Amongst them, there was a king named Māndāta, during whose reign even tigers and graceful deer became friends and drank water at the same stream! When patient celestials and restless Rākshasās had fought with each other, king Musukundan, a scion of the race of these princes, went alone to Devaloka with a gem-studded crown, a glittering golden garland, a shining sword and a bow in his hands. Like the god of virtue, he protected the city of Amarāvati, the capital of Devendra. The glory and fame of the kings of this great dynasty, who had protected the two worlds more steadfastly than they protected their own lives, has spread far and wide. Emperor Sibi hailing from the dynasty of these youngsters, gave his own life for the life of a delicate dove. Sagara's sons, the ancestors of these boys, kicked the mountains and dug the saline sea to remove the obstacles for the Aswamedha yāga started by Sagara.

"O mighty protector, when it is not possible even for Ādisesha with his thousand tongues to narrate at length the greatness and the proud ancestry of these boys, how can I extol it adequately? The great Bhageerata, who brought to this earth the celestial River Ganga contained by the matted locks of Lord Siva, was also a king of this great dynasty. One of the kings belonging to this family captured the entire world, as if he held it in his palm like a gooseberry fruit, and made even Devendra lose his position. This king, known as Nahusha, achieved the rare feat of performing the Aswamedha yāga a hundred times. The conqueror of the moon, Dileepa, and Kuvalayasuvan who slew 'Dundu' and came to be known as Dundumāran, were all descendants of the Solar dynasty; as also Raghu who, with his sturdy bow, not only defeated Devendra but also won his battles against everyone in all the eight directions. Aja, known as Aja Mahāraja is a descendant of the Solar dynasty. O Janaka, there is no one in the world who does not know Dasaratha, son of that famous monarch Aja. It is impossible even for the four-faced Brahma to narrate all the great qualities of these fine sons of Dasaratha adequately. Yet, I shall tell you what I know.

"Holding high the shield of Dharma, superior even to Manu, the author of the code of justice, Dasaratha vanquished his enemies with the ease with which the sun scorches dewdrops. He has been protecting the world, allowing none to suffer. Still, Dasaratha was sorrowful because he was childless. He prostrated himself at the

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sacred feet of Sage Kalaikottu and told him, 'Please bless me with sons to reign, after my departure from this world which I now rule.' On hearing this, the sage blessed Dasaratha with sons capable of ruling not only this world but also other worlds. As desired by the sage, necessary materials were obtained by Dasaratha for performing the yāga which was completed by the great sage. From the sacrificial fire of the yāga, a giant spirit appeared with nectarous white food in a glittering bowl. This sweet nectar was given by Dasaratha to his three wives. *As a reward for practising dharma as expounded in the boundless scriptures, and also to destroy the evil effects resulting from widespread sinful acts in the world, Kausalya was delivered of a son, Rāma, possessing dark complexion and strong shoulders. Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata who is as noble and handsome as charitable Rāma.With an impeccable character, Bharata is like a deep 'sea' where unique 'rivers' called supreme ethics (hard to brush aside) come and join. Sumitra gave birth to Lakshmana and Satrughna who are like the silvery Mount Kailas and the golden Mount Meru. Holding bows and endowed with great might, they would frighten Rākshasās who appear invincible and who have earlier succeeded in ruining dharma.* The four sons, like the four great Védas are superior to Goddess Saraswati in learning. The epic on 'Dhanur Véda' (a treatise on the art of archery) became a slave to these brothers. These children have grown up like the mighty waves of the sea that roar during the rising of the bright moon.

"It is only in name that these boys are the sons of that Dasaratha whose strong legs are adorned with a hero's anklets and at whose feet kings fall and pay tributes. It was Sage Vasishtha who carried out all the ceremonies for these boys, taught them the scriptures, and brought them up. With the help of Rāma and Lakshmana, I wanted to kill the wicked Rākshasās who were impediments to my yāga. I took these boys with dainty feet to the grove where the yāga was to be performed. The single arrow shot by Rāma not only went out after piercing the chest of Tātakai whose eyes were spitting fire but also penetrated the hills, the trees, and the earth. The huge heaps of heads of the slain Rākshāsas were numerous. In that fight, Subāhu, one of the two sons of Tātakai was dispatched by Rāma to the celestial world. I am not aware where the other son, Mārica, has gone. Thus, relieved of the menace of Rākshasās, I was able to complete my yāga. *O king, please try to understand the greatness of Rāma who is beyond the comprehension of even Brahma! If Rāma were to shoot his weapons in anger, they would uproot and completely scorch this world with all its seas and mountains. I acquired these weapons by my penance and gave them to him. They are*

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subservient to him making even me, the giver of the weapons, aghast. It was the dust on Rāma's divine lotus feet that gave Ahalya back her maiden form. I love him more than my life."

12. THE BOW

After listening to Viswāmitra, Janaka said, "What else is there for me to say? I am depressed and stand defeated by this deceptive bow, the stringing of which is a condition laid down by me for the suitors of my daughter. If this young man (Rāma) strings the bow quickly, it will make me cross the sea of sorrow. Seeta, too, will reap the benefits of her penance." Thereafter, Janaka asked the attendants standing before him to bring the sturdy mountain-like bow. Four attendants, in obedience to the king, went to the place where the bow with golden stripes was kept, and conveyed the message. Sixty thousand warriors with rock-like shoulders, thick hair and elephantine strength, inserted staffs beneath the bow, hoisted them onto their shoulders and carried it.

The great Goddess Earth was relieved of her back-ache! The sight of the bow, which appeared all-pervasive without allowing any empty space, humbled even the tall and stable Meru mountain. The people of the city gathered in large numbers roaring like the sea, to witness the event. Some of the citizens said, "None in the world except the leonine Lord Tirumāl, holding the Conch and the Disc, can handle this bow! Only if He arrives and bends this sacred bow can the wedding of Seeta be celebrated!" Some said, "It is wrong to call this a bow. It is truly the golden Meru mountain." Some others felt that Brahma might have created this bow only through his rigid penance and not with his hands. A few wondered whether there was anyone in the past who could have bent this mighty bow and shot an arrow from it. Some observed that the bow was only the rebirth of the Mandara mountain which was used for churning the beautiful ocean of milk. Some others said that it was in fact the incarnation of the lustrous serpent king, Ādisesha. Yet others wondered whether it was after all a rainbow that had fallen to earth. Some doubted the purpose for which the king had ordered the bow to be brought there. Some questioned the wisdom of the king in stipulating the condition of bending it for marrying Seeta. Some, however, believed that because of good deeds done in the past, there might be someone who could after all bend it. A few others wondered whether Seeta herself had seen it. A few of the citizens asked what the target of the arrow dispatched from this bow would be. A few others doubted

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whether even Lord Tirumāl (the holder of the Disc) Himself could bend it, and a few were of the view that it was only cruel destiny that had come in the guise of this bow.

As the citizens of Mithila who had gathered there were talking thus, the attendants brought the bow before Janaka. When they placed it on the ground, its great weight broke the back of Goddess Earth. The kings who saw the bow shivered and their hands shook. They wondered who would be able to bend it. *Janaka looked at the radiant Rāma appearing like a baby elephant, looked at the bow causing him agony, and thought of his daughter, Seeta, who was still unwed.* Sensing Janaka's state of mind, Sage Sadānanda, the beloved son of Sage Gautama, told Sage Viswāmitra, "Lord Siva who had bent the very Meru like a bow was ridiculed by Daksha, the father of Uma Devi. Consequently Lord Siva in utter fury took this bow and went to the place where Daksha was conducting a yāga. The teeth and hands of some of the Devas who were present at the yāga fell scattered. They hid themselves in unknown places. The fire that arose during the yāga was also put out. Only then did the fury of Lord Siva subside. Looking at the frightened Devas, Lord Siva handed over the strong bow to sturdy Devarātan who could plough the land with a sword, and was a scion of King Janaka's dynasty."

Sadānanda continued, "O Sage, is it necessary for me to detail the might of this bow? Who is there who knows better than you about the prowess of this bow? I will now tell you of the origin of Seeta! A marble-like yoke was harnessed to the necks of two big, sturdy, black bulls which were as strong as steel. Golden ploughs with sharp points made of diamond were connected to the yoke, and the hard earth was ploughed by us several times. While ploughing the land, as though Goddess Earth herself had emerged, Seeta, the most beautiful, as radiant as the rising sun, appeared, putting even Goddess Lakshmi, hailing from the ocean of milk along with the nectar of immortality, to shame. However much I may try, I cannot describe all the fine qualities of Seeta. *All virtues wanting to stay and settle in her, vied with one another. Beauty appears to have done a great deal of penance to attain her. Just as all rivers tended to lose their greatness after the divine Ganga's descent to the earth from the sky, all the exquisite women of the world lost their prominence after Seeta with her long ear-rings came out of the earth.*

"Those who exhibited their prowess in archery, and that great destiny necessary to secure the hand of Seeta, were in different places. Just as the Devas desired, but failed, to wed Goddess Lakshmi who hailed from the ocean of milk, the earthly kings desired

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Seeta but were unsuccessful in acquiring her. Can anything be stranger than this? Kings with the strength of mighty elephants came here with huge armies. They roared like lions and talked of marriage. In reply to them, we asserted that only he who could bend this bow of Lord Siva would be eligible to wed Seeta. *O sage gifted with words as powerful as a bow in protecting the world!* Those kings who could not bend the bow (unable to bear Manmatha's attack) began to fight with us because of their desire for Seeta. *Janaka's vast army steadily dwindled like the wealth of generous kings, while the armies of the kings who sought Seeta with her curly hair, grew like their aspirations.* The Devas took pity on Janaka and sent a huge army to assist him. Knowing this, his enemies ran away like crows on sighting a hooting owl. Since then no king has ever dared to approach the bow. We have been feeling sad that Seeta would never get married. *If Rāma can bend and string this bow, the beauty of Seeta will not go to waste."*

Deeply reflecting on all that Sadānanda said, Sage Viswāmitra turned his matted head and looked at Rāma who resembled a fighting bull. *The generous Rāma whose sacred form was as handsome as a painted portrait, understanding the mind of Viswāmitra, looked at the huge bow. Then he rose like a raging fire emerging from the yāga pit into which ghee was poured as an offering. At once, the Devas exclaimed in jubilation that the bow would perish. Rāma was blessed by the sages who had conquered the three enemies, namely, lust, anger and illusion.*

Before Rāma (commanded by the ancient Sage Viswāmitra) came forward to bend the mighty bow of Siva, Manmatha had bent his thousand bows and pierced the minds of the women assembled there, with his flowery arrows. Among those who had gathered there, some women felt that if Rāma's beautiful hands did not grasp shy Seeta's lovely hands, her life would become miserable. A few women with tearful eyes, raising their hands in veneration declared, "If Rāma, looking like a mighty elephant, does not string the bow, we will fall into the scorching fire along with Seeta of fragrant hair." Some said, "If King Janaka, who is known for his unlimited charity, desired to give Seeta in marriage to Rāma, he should have gifted her away to him and asked him to accept her. It was unwise of the king to have asked this boy to string the bow of Siva." Some blamed Viswāmitra (though he was acclaimed as a great scholar) for not being ashamed of bidding this youth to perform this feat. A few women observed, "There cannot be anyone more vicious than King Janaka." Some women felt, "If this great Rāma fails to string the bow, beautiful Seeta will be denied the

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bliss of marital life." While peacock-like women were talking thus, all good personages and sages assembled there expressed their joy by offering their good wishes to Rāma. The Devas in the sky, too, became very happy.

Rāma walked majestically towards Siva's bow, putting even the lion, the bull, the golden Meru, and the elephant to shame. With ease and elegance, Rāma took the bow which lay on the ground like a big golden mountain. He held it as though it were a garland strung with flowers intended for the rare gem called Seeta wearing bangles made of gold and conches. Those in the assembly who had kept their eyes wide open preventing the eyelids from blinking, neither saw Rāma pressing one end of the bow with his foot, nor saw him bending the other end to string the bow, because of the speed with which these acts were done. They just saw Rāma taking the bow in his hand and instantly heard the sound of the breaking of the bow!

The thunderous sound of the bow breaking was heard by the Devas. They feared that the whole universe created by Lord Brahma had been blown up. When such was the predicament of the Devas, it is needless to describe the feelings of the people of the world. Even Ādisesha (who bore the world like its root) became frightened as if struck by a thunderbolt. Exclaiming that the virtuous deeds of Janaka had been rewarded, the Devas rained flowers, the clouds showered golden rains, the seas surrounding the world threw up different kinds of precious gems and groups of eminent sages offered their bountiful blessings. All over the city of Mithila, musical instruments including the conch sent forth sweet melodious music. All the citizens became so happy that they exchanged garlands, ornaments, sandalwood paste, scented powder, fragrant hair oil, white pearls from the sea, gold, gems and silks. There was a roar of jubilation throughout the city of Mithila, like the roar of the rising waves of the sea on a full moon day. The women of Mithila, with long vél-like eyes, with faces glowing like the moon, and with gleaming teeth and ear-rings, danced to the accompaniment of honeyed music from the makarayāzh, like ecstatic peacocks on seeing rain-bearing clouds in the sky. Women with dark eyes which looked red, as though they had willingly consumed liquor, embraced their husbands. *Just as the white clouds absorb water from the sea full of rising waves, poor people received the vast wealth that Janaka offered.* The sweet music of the dancers, the nectarous music of young women, the hymns of panegyrists sung to the accompaniment of the makarayāzh, and the melodious music from instruments like the flute, captivated the ears of the intoxicated Devas who stood as still as painted portraits. The women of

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Devaloka had come from heaven to see Rāma's unique feat of breaking the bow. They embraced the women of Mithila believing them to be their kin, as the women of Mithila in their activities, facial beauty and talent for music and dance, were just like them. But, when the celestial women saw the women of Mithila blinking, they were baffled.

The citizens of Mithila began talking among themselves. Looking at Rāma some of them said, "He is the son of Dasaratha!" A few said, "He is Tirumāl with red lotus eyes!" Some remarked, "Rāma's complexion is like the dark cloud!" Some observed, "He has the colour of the purple flower!" And some asserted, "He is no human being at all!" Some were emphatic that he was Tirumāl from the ocean of milk, and declared that the world was ignorant of it. Some of the citizens said, "Seeta will require a thousand eyes to take in the beauty of Rāma; and, Rāma will require a thousand eyes each time he looks at Seeta." Some commented, "See how handsome his younger brother is." A few of the citizens said, "The world must have done great penance to have obtained these two handsome boys!" Some said, "Viswāmitra must be saluted for bringing these two graceful boys to our city for all of us to see!"

Let us now narrate the happenings inside the apartment of Seeta of slim waist, sword-like black eyes and golden bangles, who still retained a little of her life with the fond hope of seeing Rāma again. Holding on to her life which oscillated between leaving and staying on, Seeta rose from her flowery bed that was scorched by the heat of her body. Accompanied by her maids, she strenuously made her way to another bed of soft flowers sprinkled with cool water that came through a moonstone beside a lotus pond. Afflicted by the agony of separation, she cried out, "O fragrant and cool creepers, I am a woman suffering from the pangs of separation. You bring me some relief, because, through the colour of your leaves, you show me the complexion of my lord, and through your red flowers, you show me the colour of the eyes that captivated me. Though you are liberal in these two acts, you are miserly in not bringing before me that noble person whom I adore as my very life. Only if I can behold Rāma's chest, his sacred thread (shining like the rays of the moon), his garland, his bow resembling the Meru (put to shame by his shoulders), his hands stringing the bow and his quiver with its arrows, once more, will I continue to live.

"There is a cloud (with the moon) in the sky sporting a tuft encircled by a garland and holding a long bow. With its two eyes, this cloud has consumed my life and lingers within me. The cruel Manmatha with his victorious bow, has shot fierce arrows

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hitting my mind where my life rests. Of what use is the manliness of my beloved who does not come here and give me courage at this hour of my agony? O burgeoning breasts! Why have you not shrunk? If you long to press yourselves against the chest of that radiant, charitable man holding an inflexible bow in his hands, you had better do the necessary penance right now. This `moon' that wandered through my mind and finally stayed in the sky, has thrown poison on my breasts which are now conspicuous because of the malady brought on by Manmatha's arrows. The `moon' I saw was blemishless and therefore cannot be the one that appeared in the sky last night. I wonder from where this `moon' (the face of that young man) appeared! Without being scorched, my life went out of my body, pierced by the poisonous arrows shot by Manmatha with fury; and that life, falling at the feet of that lord who resembles a bull with an elephant's might, has gone with him. It is a wonder how the same life has now come back to me. Like the cloud in the sky descending on the earth, that young lord with the sacred thread pervades my mind and my eyes. Still, I do not know why I am unable to see or know him. Like fools receiving the nectar of immortality from the ocean of milk and then allowing it along with its golden pot to slip back into the ocean, I let slip the golden opportunity of embracing this sturdy great lord of mighty shoulders." As Seeta was wailing thus, drowned in a sea of agony, a maid saw the breaking of Siva's bow.

This maid, Neelamālai, with eyes like lilies in a big tank, with gem-studded chains around her neck, with her ear-rings reflecting the colours of the rainbow and her flower-bedecked hair coming loose, rushed to Seeta. Neelamālai did not pay her the usual obeisance. Instead she jubilantly danced and sang in ecstasy. On seeing this, Seeta asked her beautiful maid the reason for her extreme joy. Neelamālai saluted her and said, "Emperor Dasaratha, the proud owner of a mighty army, a sea of knowledge, and long hands known for showering gifts, rules this world with unsurpassed glory. His son Rāma is even handsomer than Manmatha who (through his floral arrows) intoxicates people with love. Rāma has such great powers that he resembles the impeccable Lord Tirumāl sleeping on the serpent bed. This Rāma has come with his younger brother and the worshipful Viswāmitra to our city. On being told by Sage Viswāmitra that Rāma had come to see the bow of Lord Siva, King Janaka immediately ordered that it be brought there. Rāma bent the bow with ease, making the very heavens tremble. He pressed one end of the mighty bow with his foot and bent it so deftly with the might of his arms, that those who had come to see it exclaimed that he must have fully mastered

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the weapon. Then, even as the Devas extolled him and showered flowers on him, the bow broke and fell, frightening all in the royal assembly.

When Neelamālai said that the young man who had come with Sage Viswāmitra was like a cloud and resembled Tirumāl of red, lotus eyes, Seeta was happy. She was now certain that he was none else than the one she had seen and loved. *Those who had earlier said that Seeta had no waist at all, now said the contrary, because, on hearing this pleasant news, Seeta's waist as well as her bosom began to swell.* In great ecstasy, she declared that going by what Neelamālai had said, the hero who broke the bow could only be her beloved. If, however, he was not, she decided that she would give up her life. While Seeta was in such a state of mind, Janaka in great joy (greater than the ear-splitting sound caused by Rāma's breaking of the bow) asked Viswāmitra, "O lord, do you want your son* Rāma's wedding ceremony to be performed today or postponed till Emperor Dasaratha (the wearer of a hero's anklets and the possessor of a roaring army) is invited and the happy news conveyed to all through the beating of drums?" Viswāmitra replied that it would be desirable and good for Dasaratha to reach Mithila early. Janaka directed his emissaries to tell Emperor Dasaratha all that had happened, and dispatched them to Kōsala with a message on a palm leaf.

13. DASARATHA LEAVES FOR MITHILA

The emissaries sent by Janaka went post-haste, like the wind, on galloping horses to the city of Ayōdhya. They reached the entrance to the palace where kings vied with one another to fall at the feet of Dasaratha. Such kings were so many in number that for want of space their crowns would knock against each other! After taking Dasaratha's graceful permission, the emissaries entered the royal assembly and made obeisance to him. Extolling Rāma, they narrated everything and said, "This is what happened after your sons left along with Viswāmitra." The emissaries then presented to the emperor the palm leaf containing the message. This was received by an expert, who was asked by Dasaratha to read it aloud. Dasaratha listened to Janaka's description in that palm leaf, of Rāma's rare ability to handle Siva's bow. *On hearing about his son's achievements, the diamond-like shoulders of*

** Poet Kamban makes Janaka use the words, 'un pudalvan' (your son), obviously to drive home the degree of Viswāmitra's love for Rāma.*

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Dasaratha bulged like mountains, and the ornaments which had stood firm over his upper arms snapped and fell.

Observing that the thunderous sound he had heard earlier, must have come from the breaking of Siva's mighty bow, Dasaratha gave costly gifts of ornaments and robes made of gold to the emissaries who stood before him. Dasaratha then declared, "Thanks to the great sacrifices performed by my ancestors belonging to the Solar dynasty, Rāma resembling Manmatha was born to me and is now in the city of Mithila. Let men mounted on elephants, announce through the beating of drums, that all our armies and kings shall proceed to Mithila in advance." It was once Jāmbavan who went around and announced the news that the crimson-eyed Lord Tirumāl had measured the three worlds with His two feet. Similarly, the announcers now went round the ocean-like army, and conveyed the orders of Dasaratha. The armies of Dasaratha gathered in such dimensions, that there was no empty space left in the world. Like the ebullient pralaya sea (which engulfs everything in the world), they left for Mithila. The fleet of chariots overcrowding the roads, made the world appear too small. The elephants decorated with face-plates studded with lustrous gems looked like clouds with rainbows. The numerous white umbrellas spread high above at frequent intervals resembled countless milky white swans. The white flags, spreading out across the sky made it look as if it was shorn of its skin.

The ornaments worn by the men of the army shone like the morning sun, and dispelled the shadows of the umbrellas (of peacock feathers) held by them. These umbrellas in turn surpassed the beauty of the clouds. The thunder of the huge war-drums put to shame the thunder from the clouds. The horses carrying women on their backs looked like rippling rivers carrying white swans. Young female elephants carried young girls with large bosoms, plaited hair and ornaments of gold. Garlanded warriors, holding swords and bows, whose shoulders excelled mountains and were covered with golden ornaments, walked with their slim-waisted female partners, like male elephants walking along with female elephants. Dasaratha, who in alleviating the sufferings of his subjects was like a staff to the creeper, had not yet left Ayōdhya. Still, his vast army which had started from Ayōdhya at his behest, was so dense that there was no space even for a black gram between Ayōdhya and Mithila. The vanguard of the army arrived at the city of Mithila, with the tail end still at Ayōdhya!

Women who accompanied the army seated themselves inside the carts in such a way as to fascinate the minds of men and make them unite in love with them. The

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humming of bees in the garlands which adorned the hair of a multitude of these women, created a new type of music for the moving carts which looked like moving lotus ponds. In a bullock-cart, which moved as fast as a chariot, a youth kept casting his eyes on a young girl, with great love and she reciprocated his love. The black collyrium from the corner of her eyes, was nectar to that young man, and made his love for her eternal! One young man, who had left his doe-eyed wife behind in his village, saw a swan and a lotus and was at once reminded of her rhythmic steps and her beautiful face. He debated whether he should go forward to Mithila or return to his village! Even kings of beautiful and large kingdoms joined the armies of Dasaratha whose conches and war drums raised thunder! The open royal white umbrellas and the white chowries of the kings raised over the armies looked like the white frothy waves of River Ganga. *The armies themselves were 'battlefields', with beautiful, divine women uttering sweet words and piercing the hearts of their lovers with captivating deadly eyes like the vél!*

Warriors gathered in such large numbers that they resembled a pride of lions. Their shoulders touching one another looked like rows of stone pillars. Their swords were so near one another that they flashed like streaks of lightning in the sky and their legs stood so close to one another that they looked like a bunch of lotus flowers. His eyes fixed on the breasts of his woman, a man lost his bearings, and walking like a blind person, he dashed against a huge elephant! Another young man caught a peacock-like girl who slipped from a galloping horse and placed her on his mighty shoulder! Yet another young man felt sorry he did not have a chest broad enough to embrace a girl with huge captivating breasts! One young warrior, walking like a rutting elephant, looked at the black eyes of a young girl and compared the sharpness of her eyes to the sharpness of the spear held by him. *Looking at a young girl with curly hair, lotus feet, sword-like eyes and ornaments over her shoulders and heavy breasts, one young man asked, "Where have you misplaced your waist?" Another sturdy youth who saw a girl who would speak only through her deadly eyes, asked her, "If you do not open your mouth and seek help, who will carry you to the other bank of the river which you will have to cross on the way?"*

In Dasaratha's armies, camels which carried heavy loads, instead of eating sweet leaves, went in for bitter neem leaves, like people who drink toddy instead of milk. Over their shoulders, Papparar, the sturdy foreigners with red eyes and black complexions, carried poles and iron chains for bringing elephants into their sheds. An elephant ran

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after a horse carrying a young lady resembling a creeper. The horse, bending its legs, galloped ahead with such speed as though it wanted to make it known that the young girl on its back was only for Devendra and none else in this world! In those armies, men were found saying, "Our Lord Rāma has broken the bow." Women who heard these words, became happy and eagerly rushed towards the men to learn more. These women neither cared to bind their beautiful long hair which came loose, nor bothered to collect the gems falling from their girdles! Women wearing fragrant flowers shed tears of joy imagining that they saw Rāma. They said, "If you have come to welcome us, please get into our chariot," and invited 'him' with their gestures as well.

The din made by speeding chariots, elephants, horses and rows of drums, filled every nook; and preventing people from hearing one another, made them appear mute. The crowd of dark-haired women, wearing robes as fine as gossamer and walking with their ankle-bells tinkling melodiously, resembled swans in ponds raising sweet sounds. Damsels who looked like Goddess Lakshmi, saw menfolk through the mesh of the fine cloth covering them. Watching this, the eyes of these men rejoiced like bees at the sight of the rutting fluid of elephants. Treading softly without hurting the ground, women, with intoxicated eyes, looked happily at men. The eyes of men reciprocated those looks, and gladdened Manmatha. Women with invisible waists, with lips like red fruit, with coral-like mouths uttering sweet words, with breasts like tender coconuts, shed scented powder from their bodies. In a huge ornamental chariot there were countless men and women shouting in jubilation, keeping in mind only their pathway and destination.

In the ponds, pools and tanks enroute to Mithila, women in the entourage saw lilies and lotuses and other water plants in full bloom resembling their hands, faces, mouths and eyes. These women beseeched their husbands to pluck the flowers for them. Some of the women travelling on the backs of rows of horses, panicked when elephants came near them, and got down. Their fragrant hair came loose and their gem-studded ornaments fell scattered. When their graceful flimsy robes began to slip from their waists, they held them with their hands and ran helter-skelter like peacocks. Umbrellas made of peacock feathers mingled with thick creepers and created darkness all around. White swords, spears and other weapons, gem-studded crowns and precious ornaments, glittered and gleamed generating light all around. Thus there was night as well as day, simultaneously! Men with lustrous bodies moved apart, after cautioning each other, "Get away from these women because in their lotus faces with pearly teeth and

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graceful smiles there are sharp swords, which will pierce you and slice you off." Along with young girls sporting dense dark hair resembling black sand, sword-like eyes and nectar-dripping red mouths, great yāzh players rode on horses and played faultless songs in the musical note Naivalam pouring honey into one's ears. A young excited elephant with small eyes became so wild that the elephant-goad, in the hands of the mahout, lost its curved shape and became useless. The elephant ran amuck making people flee hither and thither. With the thundering of drums, elephants, chariots, victorious horses, women (with eyes resembling blood-stained véls) and men, moved on majestically resembling the big blue sea which has seen the full moon.

Bedecked with flowers, accompanied by a thousand beautiful damsels who were well-versed in dance and music, her beauty putting the celestial women to shame, Kaikeyi, looking like a swan in a lake full of lotuses, rode in a gem-studded palanquin. Riding on the backs of mules, two thousand women with big, red, sparkling eyes and wearing dazzling gem-studded necklaces, went with Sumitra who rode in a palanquin (set with exquisite blue gems shedding lustre that treated even lightning with scant respect) to the accompaniment of melodious music from the yāzh. Kausalya's face with sparkling white teeth and a red mouth, looked like the silk cotton flower. As if the stars mistook her face for the full moon and clustered around it, Kausalya, the lady who brought forth the charitable Rāma, proceeded, in a palanquin set with gems, to the accompaniment of sweet music rendered by expert musicians, with the Devas saluting her. *The women who accompanied the queens were so numerous, that it might be said that there were no women left in any place other than this one surrounded by the seven seas.* These women, carrying peacocks, swans, parrots, dolls, conches, bracelets, bangles and conch-like white chowries, in their beautiful hands, walked beside the palanquins of the queens. Warriors who had eyes which were always spitting fire, with sticks in their hands as a mark of valour and bodies adorned with long robes, guarded the feet of the queens who were like celestial beings. Some of these warriors marched on foot while some rode on horses as white as milk. With breasts like lotus buds, over sixty thousand women of boundless beauty, who were even more graceful than Goddess Lakshmi, sat like portraits in carts adorned with corals, gems, pure gold, lustrous pearls and emeralds, and accompanied the queens. Sage Vasishtha, the husband of the virtuous and chaste Arundati, accompanied by two thousand brahmins, got into a pearl palanquin and proceeded towards Mithila like Lord Brahma riding on a swan. Flanked by the four types of invincible armies (elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry) the great heroes Bharata and Satrughna (in whose

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bosoms stayed the goddess of victory), holding divine bows, *followed Sage Vasishtha in the way Rāma and Lakshmana had followed Sage Viswāmitra.*

After completing his daily duties and after prostrating himself at the divine feet of Lord Tirumāl, Dasaratha, adorned with ornaments made of pearls and diamonds, happily presented gems, gold, cows and land to the deserving. He began his journey to Mithila at the most propitious time. Eight thousand brahmins, carrying gem-studded pots in their hands and reciting hymns from the scriptures, blessed the royal family by sprinkling holy water. Countless noble women sang songs of benediction and went along with them. *Among the kings who had come to see Emperor Dasaratha and were waiting near the palace, some asked, "Is the Emperor going out?" A few of them said, "The blare of the conch indicates the departure of the Emperor!" When the Emperor finally moved, some of them said, "The Emperor saw me!" A few others said, "He did not see me!" A few complained that their ear-rings had fallen off in the mêlée. Some felt, "It will not be possible to go near the Emperor hereafter."*

As Dasaratha proceeded to Mithila like another Soorya in his chariot, kings with victorious spears paid homage to him with folded hands which looked like a cluster of red lotus flowers, while horses (with jingling bells) which carried women with golden bangles appeared like lotus flowers in the midst of sea waves! The dust that rose as Dasaratha and his troops marched on, hit the sky and, with no space to go up further, came down and flew in all directions, completely destroying visibility. The sound from the conches, flutes, bugles, cymbals, trumpets and drums, surpassed the sound of thunder from the clouds. Rows of flowers were hung like a canopy of silken umbrellas. Peacock feathers drove away the heat of the sun and the royal white umbrellas put the moon to shame. The drone of hymns from the scriptures, the blare of right-whorled conches, the blessings of brahmins, the thunder of drums, the trumpeting of elephants trying to break away and the lilt of tunes indicating the time, were heard in all the eight directions as Dasaratha, to the delight of the Devas, proceeded towards Mithila. In whichever direction Dasaratha turned, he saw kings with heroes' anklets looking at him with folded hands! The elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry, raised a huge cloud of dust. There was neither space, nor another world for these four divisions of the army to occupy. *Mother Earth, draped by the sea, strained her back unable to bear the weight of the armies, making one wonder how Dasaratha could ever have been extolled for relieving the earth of her load.* Covering a distance of two yōjanas, Dasaratha reached the foot of a mountain known as

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Chandrasaila. The flowers, resembling cupid's arrows, that adorned the women's dark hair and the sandalwood paste smeared on their breasts, spread their fragrance everywhere, while the troops halted for the night.

14. CHANDRASAILA

In that huge army and entourage of Dasaratha, the voluptuous breasts of young women talking sweetly like mynah birds, were handy weapons for Manmatha. *An elephant walking majestically uprooted a tall tree to which it was tied, like a king who through his strategy vanquishes an adversary who cannot be defeated in a straight fight.* Like Lord Krishna bound to the stone mortar, had moved along with it between two giant maruda trees and felled them, an elephant walking nonchalantly along with the log to which it was tied, between two mango trees, pulled them to the ground. *A mahout who was seen pacifying an angry elephant with appropriate words to bring it under his control, appeared like a minister trying to correct an erring king! An elephant which did not pay heed to the goading of the mahout, looked like a king who turns a deaf ear to the good advice tendered slowly and steadily by a minister.* An elephant ran with the speed of wind, sniffing the path of a wild elephant, like a smaller river flowing in the direction of a bigger river. If the innumerable elephants looked like a herd of wild elephants inhabiting a dense forest, the nearby Chandrasaila looked like the leader of these elephants.

When ignoramuses rub shoulders with exemplary scholars, they become knowledgeable; similarly the black rocks on which the golden wheels of the chariots of Dasaratha's army rolled, gained a golden hue. The horses which had been brought by the Turks to Ayōdhya were fed with dainty food. Those who heard them neigh were frightened. These horses tied in rows, looked like gem-set necklaces adorning the bosom of Mother Earth. Doe-eyed young girls dancing like peacocks and young heroes holding sharp spears, mingled with each other and moved about. *From the thunderous drumbeats, the blare of the conches and the hoisted flags, people realised that it was Emperor Dasaratha's camp, and came there.* Like lions descending from tall cliffs to the foot of the hill, kings dismounted from the backs of elephants. They walked along with persons who fanned them with chowries, and entered the row of bright tents put up for them. One of the elephants fell and was covered with white dust all over. With its trunk it removed the dust from one side. *The elephant now looked black on one side and white on the other side, appearing like Sankara Nārāyana!*

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Just as virtuous persons who attain rare discrimination, at once sever relations with intimate friends who they realise are evil, galloping horses which fell on the ground immediately rose and shook off the dust from their bodies. Like sages following dharma to accumulate merit for their future births, some of the horses snapped their tethers and hastened to reach the open space in front of them.

Around the city of Pādi, where Dasaratha's army halted, rivers with crystal-clear water gave it all away and became dry. Whatever little extra water they had, which came by digging, was also given up by these rivers to the needy, like philanthropists giving whatever they had to others. In that city, men mingled intimately with women who wore attractive robes around their waists and lit the ovens in the kitchens. The smoke that emanated from the burning logs of aquila became dense like the sea (over which silent clouds were seen) and dimmed the sunlight. When the Vidyādharas who lived on hilltops came to see this city of Pādi, they were perplexed because they saw men and women of extraordinary beauty gathered there and thought that the celestial world itself had descended to the earth!

15. THE MOUNTAIN

After reaching the foot of the Chandrasaila, the troops waited there, till kings, queens, warriors, creeper-like women and several others arrived. We shall describe Chandrasaila, seen by them. The tuskers of that mountain, to the accompaniment of sweet music and dance rendered by beetles and bees, pulled down the branches of karpaga trees, along with the tender leaves, and gave them to their beloved young female elephants. Surrounded by them, a tusker, looking like the white moon in the midst of stars, pierced honeycombs with its curved and graceful tusks. The tribal men used the gushing honey for cultivating millet crops, and the water flowing from the celestial Ganga for cultivating paddy crops in hilly tracts. The moon over that insurmountable mountain region looked like a two-sided mirror. Tribal women, beautifying themselves to their hearts' content, looked into the side facing them, while the celestial women looked into the side facing the sky! Footprints of mighty and furious lions could be seen on the surface of the hills embedded with precious blue gems, while the wet footprints of dainty women could be seen on the heads of Vidyādharas living on the hilltops! Captivating the *kinnara* birds, the tribal women sang and played the yāzh, neither moving their kayal fish-like eyes towards their ears, nor showing their teeth, nor allowing their tresses to come loose, nor arching their eyebrows.

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Flowing as rapidly as the River Ganga and shining like the upper cloth of Lord Trivikrama, rows of waterfalls from the Chandrasaila brought down large quantities of gold and pearls for adorning Mother Earth. Reaching a water-tank and mistaking it for a tank of crystals, women with shining moon-like faces got their upper and lower garments drenched. Looking at this, young heroes with anklets clapped their hands and laughed. On stones as smooth as ghee but as hard as diamonds, women saw the reflections of beautiful flowers. Taking them to be real ones, they beseeched their husbands to fetch them. On all sides of the mountain, tender mango leaves shone brightly. Deer, elephants, serpents and bamboo trees were aplenty on the hilly tracts. Thin rocks on which gold dust settled, were found midway on the mountain.

The Chandrasaila was inhabited by women who were as radiant as celestial women and spoke few words. Wild black boars rolled on the turmeric paste (which these women had scrubbed off their bodies) and then tried to get rid of it by rubbing themselves against mango and sandalwood treees. Coming out of their holes in search of prey, big serpents uprooted bamboo plants. Cows which saw this ran away in fear raising a great deal of dust. In that ancient mountain, there were plenty of leafy plantain trees resembling the thighs of celestial women. While dark-complexioned tribal women in that mountain dug up the ground in quest of edible roots, their men beat leather drums loudly to drive away the tigers which lived there in great numbers. Mighty elephants bathed in tanks destroying big banyan trees on the bunds. With a row of clouds perched around its peak like a garland, the mountain resembled Lord Tirumāl with Goddess Lakshmi residing in His bosom. Like bees swarming round flowers, men, women and children swarmed round the mountain slopes playing joyously, with no thought of leaving the place.

The Chandrasaila where clouds halted resembled an elephant. The sun with its rays flashing was like a lion pouncing upon this 'elephant'. The crimson horizon was the 'blood' that flowed from the 'elephant' thus attacked! The big trees with strong branches had plenty of red and tender leaves, which made the flawless mountain look as if it were made of red gems that reflected the aura of the crimson sky. With countless peaks and pleasant scenery, the Chandrasaila was comparable to the effulgent Lord Tirumāl. Like the inseparable body and soul, men and women who loved each other dearly like male and female elephants, or mighty lions and lionesses, came and halted at the foot of the big mountain where beetles, bees and wasps buzzed loudly in jubilation. The sun, who traversed the sky in his one-wheeled chariot, disappeared behind the western mountain, bringing utter darkness everywhere as

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though a herd of giant elephants which were in hiding had suddenly come out. Then like red lotuses blooming in a vast roaring sea, lamps flared in the camps of Dasaratha's armies. The luminous white moon rose majestically into the sky from the waves of the beautiful cool sea which sprayed sparkling droplets of water like the pearls thrown up by lustrous white conches. The sound of the drums, the melodious sound of songs sung by women, songs sung by songsters tuning the strings of the yāzh, the sound of the regular beat of the hand, and the sound from the flute were heard, captivating even those in heaven.

16. PLUCKING FLOWERS

Like Lord Narasimha, emerging from the pillar, slew the toothy Asura Hiranyan, the sun, peeping out from behind the eastern mountain, dispatched the starry night with its 'thousand arms' of hot rays. With the kings assembled paying homage to him, Dasaratha boarded a sturdy chariot and proceeded on his journey. His army, too, began moving. Finally, they reached the River Sōnai. The fertile water of this river had transformed its high banks into beautiful groves. Wherever the river flowed into ponds, red lilies and lotuses bloomed. As the sun rose higher, the kings, troops and women reached a fragrant cool grove with plenty of clean tanks and ponds where they could bathe after plucking soft flowers swarming with bees. When the women reached the grove, the peacocks fled, fearing that they might be hurt by the bright bow-like eyebrows and the arrow-like red rays coming from the dark eyes of these women. Put to shame by their melodious speech, the parrots flew away. Even the swans, which saw the women gliding about with tinkling anklets, were chagrined and left the place. These women adorned themselves with ornaments made of pure gold set with gems. The words they uttered were music. Their cool hair was decked with fresh fragrant flowers. The flock of koels which saw them did not open their mouths, not out of fear but out of shyness! *Who in this world will open their mouths in the presence of orators?* Women with their lotus hands softly touched the flowering creepers which began to bend and shower flowers at their feet. When such was the adoration shown by creepers, how could there be anyone who would not bend before these women who had creeper-like waists? Even the mountain-like shoulders of men were no exception!

Having shed their flowers, the creepers lost their beauty and grew 'weary'. The women, afraid that these creepers would no longer please their husbands, adorned them with their pearls, gem-set necklaces, gold chains and ear-rings, (making them

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stoop with the weight) and then enjoyed to their hearts' content the beautiful bright sight created by them. A woman, whose black eyes were red with anger after a minor tiff with her husband, looked at a beautiful flower which had bloomed but was at a height beyond her reach and appealed to a koel with folded hands to pluck that flower for her. A man looking at tender coconuts exclaimed that they looked like the breasts of women. On hearing this, his enraged wife with sweat covering her face and panting with fury asked him, "Whose breasts are you referring to?" A battle-hungry youngster, possessing handsome mountain-like shoulders, was plucking flowers, when his wife, with a sweet voice and jet black hair, came behind him and covered his eyes with her hands. He asked who it was. His wife was furious at the thought that her husband knew other women, too! When a king plucked a fresh flower, his two wives came there, with their red lotus hands outstretched, each demanding the flower for herself. *The king stood between them and held the flower in his hand not giving it to either, like a miser who would neither refuse nor part with his wealth to those who sought alms from him.*

Women in that grove, madly went in search of beautiful and fragrant flowers, unmindful of their locks coming loose, unmindful of their robes slipping from their waists, and unmindful of even the last pearl severing itself from their pearl-chains and falling to the ground *because the flowers in the grove appeared to them more precious than even their own lives!* One woman, who was keen on knowing how her husband would react if she feigned anger, blamed him wantonly for something he had not done and picked a quarrel with him. Even when he wanted to make peace she did not yield. She soon realised her folly, because, her husband who left on account of her anger, never returned to see her beauty which she had enhanced by wearing garlands of flowers! Another woman saw a swan gracefully walking, and approached it as if it were her kin. When the swan became friendly, this woman told the swan that if it remained naked, it would be ridiculed by those who saw it and asked the swan to accept the cloth given by her! A young woman who had none to equal her in beauty, told her maid, "O maiden as precious as gold, as sweet as honey and as great as Lakshmi! I will hide. See if you can find me." She accordingly hid herself behind the flowers and leaves. When the maid was unable to find her, the woman came up from behind, closed the maid's eyes with her hands, laughed heartily, and said, "You look at me now!" A fine youth, with a bow in one hand and the string clasping his shoulder, holding a lotus flower in the other hand, moved like the sun in the dark dense lotus grove. A man sitting on the branch of a flowering tree found it so difficult to take his

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mind and eyes off his beautiful beloved that instead of flowers, he actually plucked buds and tender leaves and gave them to her. Another man with pillar-like shoulders was perplexed when he saw anger on the face of his wife, revealed by the throbbing of her fruit-like mouth! Such was the activity of men and women, as they continued to stay in that pure and cool grove. Tired of plucking and wearing flowers again and again, and wanting to swim and play in the white tidal waters, they went in search of water sources.

17. SPORTING IN THE WATERS

Flawless men and women humbling the very celestials, left the flowery groves and proceeded like male and female elephants towards tanks where flowers bloomed. The entry of these men and women into the water-tank was like the riches of Devendra plunging into the ocean of milk by the curse of furious Sage Doorvasa. While the alluring eyes of the graceful women who came to bathe shone like black lilies, their faces were as bright as red lotuses in bloom. In the tanks, some of the women threw fragrant powders, oil and musk at each other, providing food for the bees. Some others larked about in throwing flower garlands at one another. A few women splashed water on the faces of their husbands. When women with bamboo-like arms and lightning-like waists took a dip in the tank and rose, their thick hair falling over their faces hid them. Pushing aside the hair, they invited the nearby swans to come and play with them. As sweet as sugar-cane to their husbands, some women with bright eyes and soft red mouths sang melodiously. Looking at the kayal fish in the flowing water, these women asked their husbands whether water had eyes!

While sporting about in the water, a furious wife, with her kayal-like eyes turning red, hid herself behind a bunch of lotus flowers. The husband who followed her was unable to distinguish the red lotus flowers from the face of his wife and wondered what to do! A king stood amidst a group of women who sported bangles on their lotus hands and dazzling smiles on their lips. This king resembled a rutting male elephant standing in the midst of female elephants in a flaming river full of fragrant lotus flowers! Another king, stood in the company of women whose beauty humbled the pride of peacocks (in the forests) and whose tresses resembled black clouds. This king looked like the moon with bright rays surrounded by a galaxy of stars! Standing out from the rest was a girl who had two long eyes capable of captivating all men. Performing the role of Manmatha's floral arrows, she stood supreme in the midst of beautiful women, like a unique lotus flower among a cluster of various other flowers

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in a tank! Another woman whose bright face had sharp eyes resembling cruel spears stood in the midst of a bevy of beauties who looked like peacocks. This bright woman resembled the celestial creeper emerging with soft flowers from the ocean of milk!

Common men, who move with great men of wisdom and knowledge, become wise. Similarly, coming into contact with women who bathed in the tank water, the fishes there acquired the fragrance of honey, musk and the smoke of aquila. Humbled by the sight of the shining soft feet of the women moving gracefully in the tank, young swans which stood on lotus flowers, appeared to crush these flowers in anger. Sceptre in hand, a king hinted that he loved a woman. That charming woman responded by signalling to her friend, through the corner of her eye, to give the king her message of reciprocated love! Pushed by the waves of water, the red lotus flowers in the tank sank, as if ashamed of their inability to compete with the beauty of the women who bathed in the tank. After sporting in the water in this manner, men and women came out and wore their respective robes and ornaments. The moment they left, the water in the tank looked like the sky deprived of the moon and stars. *The sun who had watched the men and women sporting about in the water, as if wanting to do the same, reached the sea full of fish! Taking this opportunity, the moon who was earlier vanquished by the beautiful faces of these women, rose, wanting to fight with them again, like vanquished kings aspiring to fight again with their royal foes!*

18. FESTIVITY

The cool moonlight spread everywhere, like music attaining a physical form and permeating the world, like the overflowing of lust inherent in everyone. For lovers, this moonlight was like sweet wine; for those who suffered from the pangs of separation, it was like poison; for women playing coy it was an errand of mercy dispelling their minor discords. Such a full moon pervaded the world at the request of Manmatha! Because of the moonlight, all the rivers looked white like the River Ganga, all the seas looked like the ocean of milk and all the mountains looked like the silvery Mount Kailas. Beyond this what else can we say about the greatness of this moonlight? All beings and all objects in all the flawless eight directions looked white. Thus the earth surrounded by seas, appeared to be clad in white to celebrate the birthday of Manmatha! Women and men, belonging to the entourage of Emperor Dasaratha, were in a festive mood everywhere. Women sipped fresh nectarous liquor from beautiful golden bowls to ready themselves for dalliance with their husbands on

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beds spread with plenty of flowers. *Bees swarmed round them making a din like mendicants swarming round misers who possess vast wealth.* One woman, who did not offer any liquor to these bees was shy of sipping it in their presence. She took the stem of a red lily, dipped it in the liquor bowl and sucked the liquor.

A woman with eyes as sharp as an unsheathed sword and soft hair decked with flowers, looked like a young peacock. Though addicted to liquor, this beautiful damsel decided that as her husband who never drank was always in her heart, she would no longer think of it. Sweat appeared on the body of a woman, who, with teeth as white as the moon, bit her quivering red lips and stared through her sharp spear-like eyes, red as though the red liquor she had consumed had come out! *A woman who had a quarrel with her husband, neither informed her companions about it nor sought their help in sorting it out. Instead, she indirectly conveyed her mind to her companions through the musical notes of the makaraveena, the strings of which she tightened till her flowery hand became red.* Another lovesick woman, wanting to go to her dear lover, removed her jingling ankle-bells, broad girdles and diamond-studded ornaments, as she felt they would make a sound while she walked. She looked at the moon in great fury, because it let people see her going to him! A man and a woman loved with equal intensity and embraced each other so closely that their bodies appeared to possess one life. A woman with bamboo-like arms stood waiting for long, for her husband. Finally she saw him standing before her. Though she did not go close to him, her mind did. After some time, when she suddenly lowered her moon-like face he became frightened at this novel act of hers. A woman who suffered from the pangs of love felt that she was being attacked by evil spirits at sunset and stared blankly, oblivious to the comments of others. Along with the messenger she had sent, she lost her senses, too. Another woman did not forget her husband even for a while and was awaiting his arrival. She attained great joy at the thought of his visit, but suffered from extreme agony when she feared that he might not turn up. *Her mind went through two different experiences, like the joy of birth and the agony of death.* A woman suddenly came out of her tent to see whether her husband had arrived, but quickly went inside when he did not turn up. She looked like a flash of lightning that came out of the clouds and disappeared! Another woman kept her sufferings to herself quietly sobbing and growing thin. A soft-natured woman with white teeth in her red mouth, her hands adorned with various kinds of bangles, who had bamboo-like arms and spear-like sharp eyes, granted her generous husband his unique wish of imagining that she was a beautiful damsel from the celestial world!

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Like the sun wiping away the dew with his rays, lust dispelled the discord of love, the cause of mental agony. A woman resembling a peacock and wearing ornaments, felt shy to directly approach her husband. She pretended she was asleep and suddenly 'woke up' as though from a frightening dream and embraced him! Yet another woman with a round lustrous face came close to her husband. They embraced each other tight, reluctant to separate their bodies linked in love, unaware that day had dawned. *The warriors resembling rutting male elephants and women with black hair, indulged in an amorous tussle.* The night gradually wore away, like the slender waists of women unable to carry the weight of their beautiful compact breasts. *The moon disappeared like the new-found wealth of one who gives up doing good; and the sun rose from the dark sea full of waves like the lustrous gem adorning the chest of Lord Tirumāl.*

19. WELCOMING DASARATHA

Emperor Dasaratha, the king of kings, possessor of the royal sceptre and the white umbrella, who never gave up virtue, who always adhered to the Védic dharma, who was learned and who ruled his country righteously, reached the shore of the Ganga, with his army containing mighty elephants. The weapon-wielding army drank the entire water of the Ganga, exposing its bed of pure sand and the nether world of serpents, and making even the salty ocean thirst for the river's water. Leaving the river, Dasaratha, the ruler of a beautiful land, approached the city of Mithila full of vast fields and overflowing water sources. On hearing that Dasaratha (looking like Devendra) had arrived, joyous Janaka with a sea of galloping horses and mighty elephants, welcomed him like the moon welcoming the sun. The army of Janaka (who brought forth Seeta) resembling the ocean of milk (that brought forth Lakshmi), received the army of Dasaratha, which arrived with the blare of the conches of all other oceans.

Dasaratha's vast army consisted of gigantic elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry. The cluster of royal white umbrellas with garlands hanging over them, the canopy of umbrellas made of peacock feathers, and the fish-like festoons, screened the sky dispelling daylight and ushering in darkness. The army resembled a lotus pond of red and white flowers. It was impossible to say with certainty whether Goddess Lakshmi rested on the royal flag of Dasaratha the indefatigable ruler, or on his white

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umbrella, or in his vast army, or in his bosom, or in his gem-studded crown, or in all his descendants. The sweet hum of the bees swarming the black hair of voluptuous women, was like the sound of music played by the men of Dasaratha's army. The rumble of the chariots resembled the roar of the white waves of the sea. The trumpeting of the elephants was like thunder. The mass of dust raised by the army dried up the big seas converting them into high grounds, and even went beyond the huge sky through the passage created by Lord Trivikrama's divine foot. The darkness caused by the shade of the royal umbrellas screening the sky was removed by the lustrous rainbow-like light, which shone like the sun and the moon, from the golden gem-studded ornaments worn by those in the army of Dasaratha.

All the routes covered by King Janaka to welcome the impeccable Dasaratha, were full of a mixture of pollen, fragrant powder sprinkled gently to indicate joy, and the gold dust produced by the clashing of ornaments. The roads that Janaka passed through were full of slush made of the nectar shed by fragrant flowers, civet and saffron, paste of aquila, musk and sandalwood mixed with large quantities of rutting fluid flowing from elephants. The constant shade that protected Janaka was from the tall white umbrellas raised aloft, along with victorious flags announcing victories achieved in straight fights. *When Janaka's ecstatic army joined mighty Dasaratha's army, it was like a river joining the sea.* Janaka with his army of irrepressible elephants arrived before Dasaratha (the father of the universe) in a big chariot which ran as fast as his mind. Dismounting from his chariot, Janaka advanced towards Dasaratha, leaving behind his big army. Dasaratha invited Janaka with a gesture to get into his chariot. Accordingly, Janaka got in and was embraced by Dasaratha, whose face was blooming with joy. It was was like a tiger coming forward to receive the embrace of a lion. Dasaratha, who was king of all kings, while embracing Janaka also made kind enquiries about the latter's kith and kin. After Janaka invited Dasaratha to enter Mithila, the two of them proceeded happily towards the city. At the same time, the incomparable Rāma who was worshipped by the celestials, the terrestrials and the Nāgas of the nether world, accompanied by his younger brother, Lakshmana, started from Mithila in a golden chariot embedded with gems to welcome his father, Dasaratha.

We cannot say exactly how many branches of the army accompanied Rāma and Lakshmana. Whether it was male elephants which were greater in number in that

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army, or female elephants, or chariots or horses, none could say! Rāma had the complexion of the blue lotus and the black lily. Even beautiful portraits paled beside this prince at whose divine feet Devas would pay obeisance. *When Rāma reached Dasaratha, it was as though the life that had left Dasaratha had returned to him. Dasaratha's army bowed before the divine feet of Rāma who in turn fell at the feet of Emperor Dasaratha. As Rāma got up, Dasaratha embraced him. The big mountainous shoulders of Rāma, which had earlier bent the mountainous bow of Lord Siva, disappeared in the bosom of Dasaratha, who was like Manu. Later, Bharata paid his obeisance to Rāma and stood. The torrential tears that flowed from Bharata's shining eyes were an overflow of the great love he had for Rāma. Bharata was embraced firmly by Rāma in the same manner in which the latter was embraced by Dasaratha.* Both Lakshmana (who followed Rāma) and Satrughna (who adored Bharata) bowed before the divine feet of their elder brothers.

The universal good flowing from his sceptre, the compassion afforded by his white umbrella, and the prosperity resulting from his perfect rule, had made Dasaratha a great king. His four sons possessed all these virtues and were renowned like the four Védas. Dasaratha, who could be cited as the personification of impeccable justice administered through the sceptre, who was hailed as a great benefactor and a mother by all, saw his large army approaching Rāma and directed him to take charge of it. *We are not aware of the intensity of love these warriors had for Rāma, nor are we aware whether their innocent ecstasy was greater than their love for him. But of one thing we are certain; the rejoicing of the warriors of the army on the arrival of Rāma and his brothers was like the ecstasy of Dasaratha on seeing his sons.* After paying obeisance to him, his brothers mounted their victorious horses and affectionately accompanied Rāma who rode on a chariot. A large crowd of women with feet as soft as silk-cotton, came out of tall mansions surrounded by clouds. Standing close to each other, they watched the royal procession. With their deadly looks falling on him like a rain of flowers, Rāma reached the broad roads of the city of Mithila surrounded by big walls. Women possessing breasts which vanquished mighty tusks, raised a rhythmic sound from their anklets, not in dancing-halls but in the mansions that they had filled to have a glimpse of Rāma. As Rāma the very incarnation of Lord Tirumāl moved close to the mansions, women young and old attacked by the arrows of Manmatha, gathered to

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greet him. Let us now narrate the condition of these women when Rāma passed through the streets.

20. THE PROCESSION

With the hum of bees surrounding the fresh flowers decorating their hair and with the jingling of ankle-bells, women resembling herds of deer and peacocks assembled in the streets of Mithila like a cluster of stars and streaks of lightning. When they rushed to see Rāma, the women who were like precious jewels to that great city of Mithila did not notice the loosening of their tresses. While walking fast, they neither held their robes which were slipping, nor did they mind the ache in their slim waists. Approaching the path Rāma was to traverse, they pushed everyone urging them to make way, and tried to secure vantage points. Like bees gathering to sip honey, they thronged Rāma's route. Women, with eyes as big as the sea and as dark as the black lily, ran fast like water flowing from a height to a pit. They rushed as if they were trying to chase, catch and contain their unbridled minds which were speeding towards Rāma. *Exclaiming, "We have seen through our eyes the very substance and form of love, and have achieved today the purpose of being born as women," the women of Mithila rushed towards Rāma, like several herds of deer rushing to drink fresh water that had suddenly appeared.*

To see the divine feet of Rāma which redeemed the fair-complexioned Ahalya from her curse, and the mountainous shoulders of Rāma which broke the bow to marry Seeta, women gathered in large numbers on the route traversed by him like a vast crowd of jubilant flies swarming around nectar. *Rāma, in his chariot drawn by galloping horses, went through the streets (veedhigal), in the manner in which he went through the non-blinking eyes (vizhigal) of the women who gazed at him.* Probably, it was because Rāma remained in the eyes of these women that he was called 'Kannan'* by scholars! When the women of Mithila on that day felt sorry that Rāma's chariot ran faster than even their minds, it should be said to the credit of Seeta that she was greater than all, because she alone was able to contain and retain Rāma (who had crossed even the sky as Trivikrama) in her eyes, without allowing him to go beyond her! Looking at Rāma, except her life, a woman lost everything — her modesty, apparel,

* *Eye is known as 'kann' in Tamil.*

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conch bangles, good deeds, natural instincts, flawless beauty, mind, knowledge, brightness, sturdy ornaments, shyness, innocence and forbearance. A young woman with burgeoning breasts, struck by the arrows of Manmatha, stood exhausted with her eyes shining like kendai fish, shedding tears like droplets from the clouds. It was hard to surmise whether the vél-like eyes of these women acquired their black colour from the face of Rāma, or whether Rāma gained his exquisite complexion from the collyrium-painted eyes of these women! A young woman, whose face shone like the sword, wondered who it was who shot floral arrows at her, disregarding the prowess of Rāma's bow, as well as the command of Dasaratha that the weak should not be harmed! A woman as valuable as gold, and an artistic beauty, lost the strength to bear her own weight and discarded all her ornaments and garments except a cloth to protect her honour! A peacock-like woman, with spear-like deadly eyes, with sweat on her face, and arched eyebrows, watched the arrival of Rāma. Her infatuation for him made her see only Rāma and not the army that accompanied him, and so she thought that charitable Rāma was coming all alone! Another woman with dark hair, red mouth and bright face, was pining away with a tender heart because of her love for Rāma. She told her companion that the 'deceitful' Rāma had entered her heart through her eyes, and to prevent him from going away, she would close the gates (her eyes) and rest with him! A woman looking like an exquisite doll ignored the floral arrows of Manmatha which pierced her body. Not even realising that her tight girdle and robe had slipped, she was looking furiously at other women who were watching the divine form of flawless Rāma.

The arrows shot from the 'sturdy' bow of Manmatha, pierced the hearts of the women of Mithila. As a result, many lustrous ornaments of women, sandalwood paste (peeling off from their breasts), girdles, pearl chains, conch bangles and garlands, fell and filled the streets through which Rāma traversed. Among the women with sword-like eyes who came to see Rāma, those who saw his shoulders first, continued to see only his shoulders and not the rest of his body; those who saw his lotus-like, broad feet adorned with a hero's anklets went on seeing only his feet; those who saw his big hands saw only his hands. There were none among these women who saw the full figure of Rāma. *They could be compared to those who failed to have a full measure of the Lord.* There was a woman with long hair and a slim waist in that congregation who would have died longing for Rāma but he saved her by entering her mind and staying there, making one wonder whether there was anyone greater than Rāma who contained the entire world in His belly. A young girl, wearing choice ornaments and sporting breasts as soft

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as lotus buds, addressed Rāma, "Though you broke the mountain-like bow and reduced it to powder for the sake of a young girl, you seem to have an iron will which does not help me. Pray, save me by breaking Manmatha's bow, too." A lovesick woman, with none but her own mind to send as a messenger to Rāma, began losing her life, wondering what penance the lotus-eyed Seeta had done to possess him! A woman with crimson lips declared that on close scrutiny it was clear that anyone with such a graceful figure and with such exquisite features could not be a human being. She felt that Rāma was none other than 'Kannan' (Lord Tirumāl). *She was certain that this truth would be known later to her friends!* A bright-faced woman said that the visit of flawless Rāma to the city of Mithila was the outcome of the great penance done by Janaka! A woman who lost her heart to Rāma became weak and sobbed. She complained that Rāma did not look at women with love, nor did he see them even in his mind, and wondered whether he had any mercy.

While beautiful women were numerous in the city of Mithila, there was also no limit to the beauty of Rāma. What could a solitary Manmatha do with his bow and arrows? He lost all his arrows and took the sword in his hand! In the mean time, a woman complained, "Rāma never seems to want anything from women who are fascinated by him. He is merciless and appears to be a philosopher without any liking for women. He is, in fact, a cruel killer!" A woman who was like pure gold, questioned how Rāma had become so cruel as not to give them back their lives (which had gone after him), even though his ancestors were so charitable that they had given away *their* lives to save those who had sought their shelter! A young woman with a beautiful forehead feared she might not be accepted by Rāma. She complained, "If we examine the real reason for Rāma's breaking the well-protected bow of Lord Siva, we will know that he did so only to show his prowess and not because of his love for that peacock-like Seeta!" A woman whose garland and ornaments started slipping and falling became tired of her own life. She said that in the very presence of Rāma holding the much-dreaded bow, Manmatha was killing her and therefore, none was mightier than him!

While all the women who saw Rāma were afflicted with the pangs of love, the charitable Rāma, accompanied by a galaxy of kings holding weapons, reached the royal assembly where Vasishtha (the flawless) and Viswāmitra (master of the Védas) were seated. Rāma, wearing a garland with precious lustrous gems, prostrated himself at the divine feet of those sages like the very cloud touching the earth. Rāma, who was

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born in this world with the avowed object of protecting virtue, was blessed by the sages and was asked by them to be seated. Accordingly, he occupied a soft decorated seat and shone brightly with his three younger brothers, who were by his side like his shadow, guarding him. Thereafter, Dasaratha reached the assembly hall, along with his huge army, looking like the moon followed by stars. Dasaratha fell at the sacred feet of the two sages, Vasishtha and Viswāmitra. With a torrential shower of nectar-shedding flowers covering him and with the blessings of the brahmins, Dasaratha occupied his seat in such a majestic manner as to put even Devendra to shame.

The kings of the following kingdoms, Ganga, Kongu, Kalinga, Kulinga, Singala, Chera, the southern Pāndiya Nādu, Anga, Kulinda, Avanti, Vanga, Mālava, Chola, Mahratta, Magada, Macha, Mlecha, Elāda, Vidarbha, China, Tengana, Saka, Somaga, Sōnakesar, Turkey, Guru, Yādava, Konkana, Cedi, Telungu, Kannada, and other kings under the sky, reached that assembly hall! On both sides of Dasaratha, young girls with voices sweeter than the juice of sweet cane, fanned him with chowries which appeared like the ever-growing flowery fame of the Emperor. Women wearing fragrant honey-shedding flowers, sang songs wishing him long life and prosperity. Melodious songs (like the lisping of children) accompanied by the flute and the yāzh filled the air. The royal white umbrella of Dasaratha looked like the moon come to spread coolness for the wedding of creeper-like Seeta who belonged to the Lunar dynasty. Dasaratha's army was packed so closely that it seemed as if it was a large single unit. The whole kingdom of Janaka now looked like a densely populated city. Janaka, the father of Seeta with her shining forehead, spending his entire wealth, extended supreme hospitality with overflowing love and affection to all those who had come to attend the wedding. Without making any difference between them, he showed the same affection to the down-trodden as he did to Rāma. What more is there to say about Janaka's hospitality?

21. THE GRACEFUL SEETA

Dasaratha, surrounded by his wives looking like live portraits, sat like Devendra in the royal assembly. Sage Vasishtha looked at Janaka of the flawless royal umbrella and the sceptre, and asked him to usher in Seeta whose eyes were like tender mangoes. Janaka immediately paid homage to the sage with folded hands and asked the maids

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to bring in the incomparable Seeta. The maids, prompted by boundless love for Seeta, went quickly and conveyed the king's command to Seeta's companions.

Lustrous ornaments could only hide the beauty of Seeta's face, like eyelids hiding the two eyes. Unaware of this, the maids wanted to adorn Seeta who herself abounded in natural beauty, showing how ignorant is this huge world surrounded by roaring waves! They plaited Seeta's black hair (which was like the dark complexion of Rāma that had spread throughout the world like running creepers, unable to be contained inside Seeta's mind) with a row of soft fragrant flowers. They hung lustrous ornaments on her forehead and fixed an ornament known as *Poottu* on the hair above her forehead. They also adorned her ears with shining rings. *These swung from her ears, like her doubting mind, which wondered whether the hero who broke the fierce bow of Lord Siva was or was not the same young man who had left her in a state of exhaustion after usurping her femininity!* Her neck, which was like the dwelling place of the Conch held by Lord Tirumāl, was adorned by flawless ornaments. When Seeta, herself a jewel (and none other than Goddess Lakshmi), served as the māngalyam* for the necks of all beautiful doe-eyed women, where was the question of finding a jewel for her neck? Her maids placed a garland of pearls over her bosom already decorated with ornaments. Whether this garland was like a string of stars in the sky or like a segment of the growing beautiful crescent moon or like the cool circle of light shed by her shy smile and settling on her bosom, it was hard to say. Seeta, with her beautiful feet, had the distinction of adding red colour to the red lotus flower. *The bright red light from her body, made the white pearls worn by her, red, just as virtuous persons transmit virtuous qualities to those who come into contact with them.*

Seeta's waist was strained by the weight of her heavy breasts. Her arms with their ornaments could only be compared with bamboos set in rows, with rubies emitting red light and pearls dazzling the eyes. "Seeta's delicate hands must have done penance to be grasped by the red hands of Rāma at their wedding ceremony," said a maid and adorned Seeta's hands with ruby bracelets emitting red light, as if encircling her hands with the rays of the morning sun to enable the lotus flowers (Seeta's hands) to remain open even during nights. Manmatha's sugar-cane and flowery creepers were drawn

**Māngalyam is considered to be a part of Goddess Lakshmi.*

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(with sandalwood paste and musk) on Seeta's breasts which caused further agony to her slim waist that made everyone wonder whether it existed or not, like the Supreme God attained through different paths! The maids beautified Seeta's bosom with a special type of pearl chain. Differing from the crimson light emanating from her body, the light from these gem-set ornaments spread in all directions, dazzling the eyes of her companions, too. Her divine beautiful feet which were red even without the help of the paste of red flowers, were softer than a soft flower. Over those divine lotus feet, ankle-bells were worn, which raised a loud sound, as if announcing that her divine feet were extremely delicate. Though it could be said that Seeta's eyes were formed with poison in the middle, surrounded by nectar on all sides, her long straight eyes did not deceive or steal! They were as cool as rain. *It was hard to know whether their blackness was due to the collyrium applied on them, or because they were full of Rāma's complexion!*

On the forehead of Seeta, who herself shone like bright vermilion among the women of all the three worlds, the maids applied vermilion resembling a star inside a waxing crescent moon of the third day. Seeta's plaited hair as well as her ears were covered with soft flawless flowers. Over them was smeared fragrant gold dust similar to the pollen powder from the flowers of punnai. After completing the beautification of Seeta, her maids showed a ghee-lit flame around her. They placed flowers in fresh water and poured it in front of her. They worshipped God, gave exquisite gifts of gold to great scholars well-versed in the Védas and laid rows of white mustard on Seeta's head. These maids who had brought up peacock-like Seeta, went round her, did ārati, took a drop of this ārati water and applied it on Seeta's forehead to ward off evil. The maids who completed the beautification of Seeta kept on looking at her, consuming her beauty through their eyes, like bees sucking nectar from lotus flowers. Looking at Seeta who had taught fine words to parrots, the dazed maids were at a loss for words with their natural feminine qualities shaken. After all when sheer beauty is seen, the minds of men and women are one and the same!

As if looking at the full moon, maids with dark cloud-like hair looked at Seeta who lent beauty to ornaments. Even among women with the looks of a frightened deer, only one of their features would be enticing. If, in a woman (Seeta), all her parts acquired exquisite beauty, who are there who can contain their adoration for her? *While Lord Tirumāl had the Conch in His hand, Seeta wore bangles made of*

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conches. While Tirumāl had lotus eyes, Seeta (Lakshmi) had her abode in the lotus flower! Because of these common features, Seeta, chaste as Arundati, was like Lord Tirumāl (Rāma). How else can one describe the greatness of Seeta? Innumerable maids lisping sweet words, wearing broad girdles, hip belts in the shape of a serpent's head, and the three types of anklets, surrounded Seeta like the celestial dancers of Devendra's kingdom. She was also surrounded by hordes of dwarfs, hunch-backs and maids who paid homage to her. Like the light that never fades, like the tender moon surrounded by stars, Seeta walked towards the royal assembly. The light from her ornaments spread on the floor on which she walked. It seemed as if Mother Earth, the mother of creeper-like Seeta, fearing that if she were to walk on the bare ground her divine soft feet would suffer, had spread tender leaves and flowers over the entire path Seeta was to tread. Walking like a peacock with its graceful feathers and shining body, putting swans to shame, Seeta proceeded, fanned by white chowries.

The virgin Seeta, acclaimed as the eye of all the women of all the worlds, walked under a sparkling canopy which appeared like the very sun (Rāma's forefather) come down to see the beauty of Seeta! The kalābam (girdle) made of shining gold and other gem-studded ornaments worn by her, gleamed like bows and swords. With her body and her ornaments dazzling like lightning, Seeta walked on her bright little feet, straining her slim waist. The lustre of gold, the fragrance of flowers, the quality of sandalwood and the flash of lightning were all attributes visible on Seeta's body! Walking gracefully, putting to shame the gait of the swan, the beauty of the celestial dancers and the sweetness of nectar, Seeta reached the gem-studded royal assembly. *Women with bamboo-like arms and men, stared breathlessly like portraits, without moving their eyelids, at the pristine pure form of Seeta, who, like the scriptures, was created by none!* When he saw Seeta coming, in the distance, the ocean-like Rāma had doubts whether she was, or was not, the one he had seen in the maidens'apartment; but, when the nectar-like Seeta came closer, he realised that she was the same maiden whom he had seen and loved. He was like Devendra who saw the nectar of immortality emerging from the ocean of milk. With bewilderment Rāma told himself, "By the grace of dharma, this young woman with her red mouth shedding nectar mixed with honey, has come from the maidens' apartment to this place. *Not only is she in my mind, she is outside as well!"*

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On seeing Seeta, Vasishtha was happy because he realised that due to the great penance done by sages like him, Lord Tirumāl holding the Conch and the Disc had taken birth as Rāma; and Seeta was none other than Goddess Lakshmi dwelling in the lotus flower! Dasaratha who had gone round the world and holding the sceptre had reigned with unalloyed justice, saw the great beauty of Seeta and felt, "Though I have been ruling the seven worlds, only today have I attained the most gratifying wealth!" As soon as Seeta arrived, except the hands of divine Rāma, Dasaratha, Janaka and Vasishtha and the other sages, *the folded hands of all those who were present in the assembly rose above their heads in obeisance, because inwardly they realised that she was a goddess. After all, is not the body under the control of the mind? Seeta who had discarded her abode (lotus flower) and willingly entered the palace of Janaka, first offered obeisance to Vasishtha, Viswāmitra and other sages,* and then to Dasaratha. Later, she was seated near her father with her eyes shedding tears of joy. Viswāmitra, the first among sages, on seeing Seeta, observed that she was the original mould which produced beautiful women. He wondered, "When Seeta with her intoxicating eyes is the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi, will not the green mountain-like Rāma break seven Meru mountains, let alone this bow, for the sake of acquiring her?"

Seeta, who had heard from many about the prowess of Rāma in bending and breaking Siva's bow, was not sure if this was the same young man whom she had seen and loved. *Though she had the indelible image of Rāma in her mind, she now saw him again, by feigning to arrange her bangles and looking discreetly through the corner of her eye. When the river of her bright sight from the rear of her long black eyes flowed into the huge ocean of Rāma, Seeta regained her life. Seeta, a queen among women, now swelled with joy as if she had consumed every drop of the nectar of immortality. Realising that the 'thief' who had stayed all the while in her mind was the same Rāma who broke the bow, she shed her sorrow and attained great ecstasy like one who realises God after the disappearance of ignorance!* Emperor Dasaratha, addressing Sage Viswāmitra said, "Great one, please let me know the auspicious date for slender Seeta's wedding which will usher in limitless good." Sage Viswāmitra who had done great penance, replied, "O monarch of fertile Kōsala, the most auspicious day for the wedding is tomorrow." As soon as Viswāmitra said this, Dasaratha stood up. Blowing his victorious right-whorled conch set with diamonds, Dasaratha took leave of the sages assembled there, left the royal assembly, and reached the fine palace

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meant for him. Swan-like Seeta, though unwilling to leave Rāma, finally left the hall. Rāma, too, left and reached his golden mansion. Kings wearing gem-set jewelry, also left. All the great sages, too, left. Even the sun that spread bright light, disappeared behind the mountain.

22. THE WEDDING

King Janaka of extensive fame pleasantly attended to the needs of all those who had arrived for the wedding, making everyone happy. Kings with armies of mighty elephants and all other royal scions and also those in the service of these kings, felt that they had entered the celestial world with their earthly bodies. On the night before the wedding, Seeta was like a thirsty person who had sighted an inaccessible tank but could not find the path to it. Suffering from love pangs, she addressed the night, "Is there anyone except you, who would slyly slay weak persons (like me)? Rāma my lord will come at dawn as soon as the sun rises. You had better disappear and rise as day." Talking to her mind, Seeta said, "You appear to have gone along with the divine feet of that black sun Rāma, intending to come back with him when he returns. Ever since my birth, you have been wandering with me. For the sake of just one day, is there anyone who would desert me like you?" Addressing the nightingale, she said, "Living on top of the palmyrah tree, you will not fly without your mate. If this night (endless like the roaring seven seas) does not break into day because of me a sinner, should you irresponsibly sing now and needlessly attract the blemish of taking away my life?" Seeta then turned to the moon and asked, "Is there anyone other than you who has taken up the task of slaying poor ones like me pining in solitude?" Seeta lamented, "You tiger known as thenral (southern breeze), taking shelter in a mountain cave! Those who have not been separated from their husbands, receive your fragrant coolness; those who have been separated, are tormented by you with your excessive heat. Are you out seeking me as your prey? Cloud-like heroic Rāma, moving in the streets, has seized me firmly during the day and the night. What justice is this? Do kings hailing from renowned dynasties go after virgins in this manner? Has this night been reduced to a sinner's hell?" Seeta went on talking to herself and said, "How many yugas will this hellish black night last? Rāma has not been graceful in relieving me of my affliction. Yet my love drifts only towards him. The music does not stop. The night

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does not fade away and the day does not dawn. Neither do my thoughts of Rāma leave me and relieve me of my mental agony. My life, too, does not leave me. My eyes refuse to sleep. Is it proper for me to suffer like this?" Sharing her grief with the sea, she said, "O sea, you rise and fall tirelessly with your bangles (conches) without sleeping. Are you also like me, a maid always pining for your lover? Tell me the truth?" Prattling continuously, Seeta kept awake. Though she was in agony and was tired, Seeta still retained her fine feminine qualities like shyness.

On that night full of darkness, thinking of Seeta, Rāma said, "After I saw Seeta in the maidens' apartment, with abounding love I drew her portrait in my heart, using my eyes as the brush. When I saw her again today, I could not see the shores of the ocean of this unique woman's beauty, with my eyes dazzled by lightning. O moon, shining like the divine face of Seeta, you appear to be an excellent manure for the seed of love! Will you not befriend one who is separated from his queen? The darkness, spreading all over the world, wanting to remove my life from my body, extends like the eyes of Seeta. The night also seems to be endless like the blemish of a coward running for his life after the death of his leader in the battlefield." Addressing his mind, Rāma said, "You have run after Seeta, who is like a wild deer. You do not think of me who belongs to you. Why have you not come back to me? Is it because you have gone too far, or because Seeta did not ask you why you went after her and so you could not take leave of her, or because you, too, have forgotten me? There is an old saying that deadly poison rests in the teeth of the serpent which emits bright light from its eyes. Now this poison rests only in the soft looks of Seeta, who is always in my eyes and mind. When Seeta with nectarous words, and shining hair, has hills, banks of water sources surrounded by plants and flowers, extensive groves and other places to play in, why should she have chosen my mind?"

Meanwhile, King Janaka ordered, "In view of the celebration of Seeta's wedding, the fine city of Mithila shall be beautified with fragrant flowers, lustrous gems and scented cosmetics." Janaka's command was conveyed to one and all by the beating of drums mounted on elephants. Soon, all renowned elders, youngsters, women who had their hair smeared with scented oils, and the rest of them talked among themselves in great ecstasy and disappeared quickly to beautify the city. *The drum-beaters announced, "Rāma with his lustrous collyrium complexion and Seeta resembling the dweller of the lotus flower will enter into flawless wedlock tomorrow."* As though to

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see the divine appearance of Rāma on the eve of his wedding, the sun rent the night with his red rays and appeared in his chariot. The people of Mithila decorated the city with festoons. They covered all the pillars with silk. They adorned the auspicious overflowing pots with beautiful cloth. The peaks of tall mansions were decorated with shining gems. Dainty food was cooked to feed those who recited the scriptures. Women treading softly like swans and youths resembling young bulls planted arecanut trees and plantain trees in the entire city of Mithila and selected big pearls out of a heap of rare ones for decorating themselves.

The citizens of Mithila sprinkled sandalwood paste and aquila over the roads. They showered the streets with beautiful and fragrant flowers. They hung a number of costly pearls on the gates of mansions set with lustrous gems, which put even the rainbow to shame. The high marble pials with golden lining emitted heat through their gold, and coolness through their marble, like the sun and the moon! While the lower portion of these pials was fitted with lustrous gems, the upper portion was decorated with flaming oil wicks in mud cups. In all the porticos of lofty mountain-like mansions, just as stars twinkled in a cluster in the vast sky, precious lustrous pearls gleamed on shamianas which gave shade from the hot sun. On elevated platforms stuck with emeralds and diamonds, maids placed blazing lamps. Along the walls, they planted golden creepers, which shone like the sun. Smoke came from the burning of aquila wood. Cart-loads of cool fragrant flowers rolled in. Plantain leaves, betel leaves, and varieties of fruits were brought from the gardens. Making a great din, and swinging their glittering ear-rings maids gave a display of folk dances. They smeared themselves with scented paste and wore attractive robes. They adorned their hair with fragrant flowers. They stood before mirrors, applied vermilion on their moon-like foreheads, and red colour over their flower-like red lips. Pearls, golden jewels, conch bangles, corals, soft fragrant scented powders, and pollen from flowers, which fell from these peacock-complexioned beautiful women, were gathered and thrown away as rubbish!

Kings and sages who arrived, drank through their ears the sweet wine of music from the yāzh. Panegyrists who created music, wandered hither and thither in the company of many young women. Dancing-girls gathered in large numbers. Experts in various branches of the arts, assembled. Rulers of big kingdoms reached the entrance to the palace. Pearls in the ornaments worn by them fell scattered. Their big tall crowns dashed against each other, and gold dust and gems fell in heaps. With a shield

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glowing like the sun, in one hand, and a sharp sword shining like the moon, in the other, young heroes moved about like tuskers well-versed in warfare. Dancers, and women with bewitching smiles, arrived and assembled. While the jewels hung in the streets shone brightly, the dazzling lofty buildings on the two sides of the street caused confusion among young men and women looking for the places allotted to them. Some came in chariots and palanquins; some came riding cloud-like male elephants; some came riding female elephants; some came in carts; while the rest came walking. People who came to witness the wedding, replaced their ornaments of precious stones with pearl-studded ones. Their curly hair was decked with artistic bunches of flowers. They wore red silk robes with pictures imprinted on them. *Women who had deadly eyes and spoke nectarous words, whose lips were like red pith, who had burgeoning breasts, slim waists, and the gait of a female swan, and women who walked like female elephants, arrived for the wedding.*

It would be impossible to describe in its entirety the celebration of that grand wedding in the city of Mithila. Suffice it to say that the wedding day resembled the day when Devendra was crowned in the celestial world. The hall where Seeta's wedding was to be celebrated was so huge that its length and breadth could not be measured. Its roof was covered with gold plates. The lofty, mountain-like hall was bedecked with gems. The king of kings, Dasaratha, majestically marched towards the hall, with his royal umbrella spreading tender moonlight, with the gems embedded in the several ornaments worn by him emitting sunshine, with the bees swarming over his flowers giving sweet music, and with the dust raised by his victorious galloping horses screening the very sky. The auspicious drums sounded like rain! Conches and bugles, long trumpets and large drums created a din. The recitation of the four Védas by the sages resembled the roaring of the mighty waves of the nocturnal sea. Broad chariots, elephants and galloping horses moved in lakhs. Dasaratha arrived at the wedding hall along with kings who worshipped him.

Enhancing the beauty of a gem-studded golden throne, Dasaratha, seated on it surrounded by kings, looked like Devendra surrounded by the celestials. The sages and kings sat in the seats allotted to them. Janaka, too, surrounded by his kin, sat on a throne. The wedding hall was full of kings, great sages and other personages, and women who walked as softly as the swan! The unique hall looked like the golden Meru mountain where stars and planets assembled. *In that wedding hall which was*

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ably constructed by the divine architect Mayan, there were clouds (tresses of women),there was lightning (flashing bodies of women), there was the incomparable crowd of fishes (eyes of women), there was the sun (Dasaratha) and there was also the moon (Janaka). The hall created by Mayan thus looked like the very universe created by Lord Brahma! Venerable sages with great penance to their credit, kings, Devas and other reputed personages filled that hall. It was like the sapphire-complexioned divine belly of Lord Tirumāl who had swallowed the entire universe, including heaven and earth. To sum up, there was nothing more to say except that all people in all the worlds wanted to witness the wedding of Seeta. Let us now turn to Rāghava (Rāma) who had left the serpent-bed to appear in Ayōdhya!

In accordance with the Védic rites, Rāma was given a bath with the water from the seven seas containing all the conches, with the sacred water described in the flawless scriptures, and with water from rivers like the Ganga. He then worshipped the Supreme Lord of great splendour, who was the family deity of his ancestors. Like the moon embracing the cloud, sandalwood paste was applied over the dark body of Rāma whom none could portray and who was the embodiment of limitless compassion. Adorned with a garland of flowers and a garland made of red gold, Rāma appeared like the big sea and the bright-rayed moon. Rāma's hair was adorned with a special type of hairclip. His two ear-rings seemed to be the sun and the moon who had watched Seeta's sufferings and had come as her messengers to pour out her love into his ears. His forehead was adorned with a vermilion-like jewel. Like Lord Siva seen with the crescent moon in his long tuft, Rāma now appeared as if he wore the divine sun on his head! His neck shone like the conch near Tirumāl's disc! Around this neck was a creeper-like pearl necklace which seemed to be Seeta resting on his body. The diamonds etched in Rāma's jewels shone like the dots on the hood of a serpent. The countless ruby stones in the jewels, looked like fire. The jewels worn on his mighty handsome shoulders looked like the great serpent Vāsuki. The tight-fitting big bangles made of lustrous pearls on the big wrists of Rāma, protector of the world, appeared to indicate that he was the very origin of the three types of worlds. The ornaments on his attractive mighty arms shone brightly like large baskets made of gold and gems hanging from the branches of the celestial karpaga tree.

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A garland set with nine gems adorned Rāma's bosom (the dwelling place of Goddess Lakshmi) like the rainbow in the sky amidst lightning and clouds. *The upper cloth over Rāma's chest was of such purity that it was like the pure knowledge of great philosophers who followed the formidable path of religion difficult for ordinary mortals to pursue.* The Yagnōpaveetam (three strands of thread) across his chest looked like the unapproachable sun, moon and Agni; the uniting knot seemed to establish that Rāma was the combination of the Trinity of Gods, imperceptible even to the Devas and sages! He wore a belt-like ornament known as udara bhandanam from which great lustre was shed by a single big gem. This ornament looked like a golden lotus flower blooming from his belly like another Brahma and a new world!

Rāma, wearing a shining white silk cloth, looked like the pleasant black sea embraced by the cool ocean of milk. His girdle, made of gold and set with cool pearls and lustrous sapphires, looked like the golden Meru. A sword was tucked in that girdle as though the sun which encircled the mountain was transfixed in a place. A jewel with exquisite workmanship which he wore on his thigh had the shape of the mouth of a whale in front. It had gems for eyes and diamonds for teeth. The several bright colours that came from the 'eyes' and the 'teeth' of this 'whale' appeared to measure the boundaries of the different directions. The anklets adorning Rāma gripped his legs so firmly that they appeared to question how it would be possible henceforth for the Lord to take gigantic steps to measure the world! *As a reward for the penance done by the Devas and to protect them, Lord Tirumāl, who rose from His divine sleep on the serpent-bed, taking incarnation as Rāma presented Himself in the above manner. Foremost of the Trinity of Gods, the underlying cause for all the worlds and lives, the ultimate ecstasy of all those who have severed worldly attachment, father of all, nectar from the ocean of milk, were all the great attributes of Rāma. Can he be compared with anyone except himself?*

After 'beautifying' himself, Rāma gave away tens of thousands of cows, pure gold, vast tracts of land and the nine precious gems, as gifts to virtuous persons. Thereafter, with the blessings of the sages who considered the laudable four Védas as their wealth, Rāma came out and boarded a chariot which had a golden axle and silver wheels. Diamonds and other gems emitting lustre were fixed into the deck of the chariot which resembled the single-wheeled chariot of the sun. Yoked to it were four

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horses of perfect features, capable of understanding the commands given, exquisitely handsome to look at, and comparable to the four ingredients* required for happiness. Rāma proceeded in the chariot, with Bharata holding the reins, and the archers Lakshmana and Shatrughna fanning him with chowries. Ordinary mortals who saw Rāma arriving in the chariot, became divine. Whether it was because of Rāma's lovely divine form, we do not know. The Devas, accompanied by dancers like Rambha and other celestial women, gathered in the sky to witness the wedding of Seeta. They danced in ecstasy crying that the destruction of the Rākshasās had become certain now. The maidens of the wealthy city of Mithila showered flowers, sprinkled fragrant powders and gave away lustrous gems, gold and cloth, as if intoxicated by the beauty of Rāma! *Just as philanthropists offered even the jewels they wore after giving away liberally all their material possessions, the maidens who saw the charitable Rāma let all their jewels slip from their bodies (which had become thin).*

Like the sun with his red rays reaching the Meru, Rāma, the vanquisher of enemies and a great archer, arrived in his chariot at the wedding hall, where the victorious king Dasaratha, was already seated with a large number of kings surrounding him like a herd of elephants. Getting down from the chariot, the giver of boons, the great Rāma, wearing a fresh flower garland entered the hall with Bharata and Lakshmana affectionately holding his two hands. Rāma first paid obeisance to the eminent sages there, then to his father Dasaratha (the embodiment of truth and protector of justice), and sat by his side. The slender Seeta, with a golden complexion, with arched eyebrows, resembling bows, with eyes resembling kayal fish, with a face resembling the full moon and with teeth resembling jasmine buds, `sprouted` from a chariot. Seeta, who was earlier born from the ocean of milk and subsequently born on the earth, entered the wedding hall as if she had risen from a mountain. All the Devas, looking at Rāma with gratitude said, "This day is more auspicious than that day when Lord Tirumāl married Tirumagal (Goddess Lakshmi)."

How can I, with my poor wit, describe the grand wedding of Seeta, whose unique beauty stands out supreme in all the three worlds? To see the splendour of Rāma and Seeta in their beautiful wedding attire, and to witness their wedding celebrations, Devendra with Indrani, Lord Siva with Uma, and Lord Brahma with Saraswati

** The four ingredients are, Aram (righteousness), Porul (material wealth), Inbam (joy), and Veedu (salvation).*

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appeared in the sky. Sage Vasishtha, surrounded by other sages, joyously reached the wedding hall with all the necessary materials for the flawless performance of the wedding according to Védic rites. On a square of white sand, Vasishtha placed sacred grass at appropriate places. He kept soft flowers at specific points. Igniting the sacrificial fire (hōmam) inside a circle, he poured ghee over it making the flame flare up. Chanting hymns from the scriptures, Vasishtha conducted the wedding ceremony. Magnificent and victorious Rāma, and swan-like sweet Seeta came to the dais and sat close to each other on the wooden planks laid out for the ceremony. *They looked like a combination of bhoga (worldly enjoyment) and yōga (heavenly ascetism). Janaka stood before the emperor's son, Rāma, offered his blessings and said, "May you live long with my exquisite daughter, like Lord Tirumāl and the dweller of the lotus flower, Tirumagal." Janaka then poured pure cool water on the big red lotus hands of Rāma and offered Seeta to him. Brahmins gave them their blessings. Married women sang songs wishing the bridal couple a long life. Kings wearing crowns and garlands offered their felicitations while the sages blessed them. Along with these, sacred conches were blown. With the karpaga flowers showered by the Devas, golden flowers showered by the kings, lustrous pearls showered by others, and the natural flowers showered by all, the earth appeared like the sky full of shining stars! On that auspicious day, Rāma poured ghee into the oblation fire after chanting the scriptural hymns flawlessly. Then he grasped the tender, soft hand of Seeta in his big one. As the wedding ceremony commenced, the broad-shouldered Rāma went round the oblation fire followed by Seeta who was a picture of modesty. Seeta following Rāma was like the body following the soul, unlike life following the body in different births! Rāma and Seeta went round the oblation fire and paid their obeisance to it. After pouring fried grain over the oblation fire and performing other ceremonies, the bride (Seeta) completed the ritual of treading on the grinding-stone. Then Seeta saw the blemishless Arundati, the very form of chastity, standing before her!*

After completing the rituals of the wedding, the happy bridal couple fell at the feet of Vasishtha and other sages who had done great penance, and also at the feet of Dasaratha. Later, taking the hand of Seeta, (covered with golden bangles), Rāma escorted her to his palace. After the culmination of the ceremony, all the sacred drums thundered and the conches blared; there was the loud drone of the chanting of the four

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Védas; the Devas roared in jubilation; several arts roared; songs wishing long life were sung in ecstasy; swarms of bees buzzed; and even the seas roared in great joy. *Rāma prostrated himself at the shining feet of Kaikeyi whom he loved more dearly than he loved his own mother!* Then he made obeisance to his mother, Kausalya, by placing her two divine feet over his head. Finally he paid homage to the pristine pure Sumitra. The swan-like Seeta also paid her homage to the three queens, by bowing and touching their beautiful feet (resembling golden flowers) with her head. They were immensely happy and extolled Arundati-like chaste Seeta. They said that she would be a perfect jewel for their exquisite son, Rāma. They embraced Seeta and declared, "Who is there other than Seeta, who is ideally suited to be the wife of Rāma of lovely eyes?" They blessed her and gave millions of gold coins, countless beautiful and rare ornaments, a number of maids to serve her, vast territories, fine gems and rich robes.

Possessing the impressive figure of a dark sea and the heart of a merciful ocean, Rāma finished all the ceremonial functions as directed by great sages who were well-versed in the scriptures. Accompanied by Seeta whose love rose like the rising sea, Rāma reached a chamber which was like the ancient ocean of milk. On that auspicious day in the month of Panguni synchronizing with the Uttara star, the great Vasishtha completed the wedding ceremony of Rāma, through the sacred oblation fire. The three daughters* of Janaka and Kucadhwaja, namely Oormilai, Māndavi and Sritikeerti, maidens with beautiful eyes and fit to be born in the celestial world, married Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrughna, respectively. After they all willingly got married, Dasaratha gave away all his acquisitions, *except his great name and fame which he had zealously accumulated for a long time,* as charity. Distributing munificent gifts with boundless pleasure, Dasaratha spent a few leisurely days in the city of Mithila talking to King Janaka and the great sages. Let us narrate the events that followed.

23. PARASURĀMA

The great Rāma comparable to none but himself, along with the koel-like Seeta, stayed in Mithila enjoying worldly bliss. One day, Sage Viswāmitra heartily blessed Rāma, left Mithila, and reached the golden Himālaya mountain. A few days later, the

* *Oormilai was born to Janaka after Seeta. Māndavi and Sritikeerti were the daughters of Kucadhwaja, brother of Janaka.*

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mighty Dasaratha pleasantly said, "Let our armies and others leave for Ayōdhya." Accepting the homage paid by the assemblage of mighty kings, Dasaratha gracefully boarded an incomparable lofty chariot. The sons and the daughters-in-law, too, paid their respects to Dasaratha and accompanied him along with other members of the royal family. All of them reached the highway leading to Ayōdhya, drowning the citizens of Mithila in a cruel sea of agony as if their very lives were leaving their bodies. The hearts of the people of the beautiful city of Mithila followed Dasaratha who was at the vanguard of the entourage that was proceeding towards Ayōdhya.

As Dasaratha went on, birds like peacocks appeared on his right portending good, while birds like crows appeared on his left portending evil. Dasaratha immediately apprehended some trouble on the way. He stopped and consulted an expert in the science of omens. Addressing the mountain-shouldered king, the expert said that there would be an impediment which would, however, be beneficial. Suddenly, Parasurāma holding an axe, arrived. His flowing hair spread on his sides. He walked like the Meru mountain, spitting fire from his entire body, and threatening to scorch everyone with his roving eyes. Parasurāma, capable of shooting sharp arrows from his awesome twanging golden bow, arrived on the scene looking as if he would toss the worlds like ships on a rough sea, making even the mightiest elephants tremble with fear and forcing the Devas to take to their heels. The fury with which Parasurāma appeared, set one wondering whether he was out to bring the heavens down, or raise the earth to the level of heaven, or take millions of lives to feed Yama! His eyes sparked fury, like blood spurting from a wound. On seeing Parasurāma's wrath, which was like smoke emanating from the tip of a trident, even the sun who was coming round the Meru mountain in his chariot changed his course. With his mighty shoulders reaching the boundaries of all the eight directions, Parasurāma came in such a frenzy of fury that he resembled Lord Siva (with the moon by his tuft) engaged in the cosmic dance during pralaya, when even the five basic elements perish.

Kārtaveeryārjuna, the best among kings, had a mighty army spread all over the world. His thousand shoulders had been severed by the sharp axe of Parasurāma. Furious with all the kings, Parasurāma had taken a vow to annihilate twenty-one generations of them. Parasurāma used to bathe in the sea of blood of the slain kings. Parasurāma had done a great deal of penance. With his sharp arrows, he had pierced the Krounca mountain when Lord Muruga had a spell of fatigue. Parasurāma had the

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rare ability to force mountains to go underground and to make the seas rise to the heights of mountains. Looking at this terrible Parasurāma, and not knowing why he had come there, Dasaratha was in distress. Dasaratha's enthusiastic army which was happily marching, came to a halt when the leonine Rāma was confronted by Parasurāma with sparks of fire from his eyes. As Rāma with his handsome eyes wondered who it was, Dasaratha with his crowned head touching the ground, prostrated himself at Parasurāma's divine feet. Even then the shore of Parasurāma's fury was not sighted. As if unleashing the pralaya fire, with a tone resembling drumbeats, Parasurāma told Rāma, "I know of the might of the bow you broke! Now I wish to test the strength of your handsome shoulders! I still have the itch for a fight left in my robust shoulders known for slaying countless kings. This is the reason for my visit and nothing else." On hearing these words, Dasaratha was aghast and told Parasurāma, "You have conquered the entire world and presented it gracefully to the great Sage Kasyapa. Even the Trinity of Gods cannot match your valour. When that is so, how can human beings fight you? Rāma and I are beholden to seek your refuge. O holder of the lustrous axe spitting fire, those who commit misdeeds knowingly are destined to die. Is there any such thing Rāma has done foolishly or out of pride? Instead of fighting with your peers, is it proper for you to fight with weaklings? O sage with great penance to your credit, having gifted this earth, you are privileged to rule the seven worlds. Please do overcome your anger. You have shown mercy to kings before. Is it fair on your part now to be enraged with us? What is the use of your might, though of a high order, if it does not conform to strict justice? The strength of a person will be considered great only when it treads the path of dharma. Please realise that your challenge to test the strength of Rāma will bring you dishonour! O eminent possessor of pillar-like arms, my son Rāma has no enmity towards you. If he were to die, it would result in the extermination of my race and the people of my land! It is my earnest prayer to you not to destroy us."

Dasaratha fell at the feet of Parasurāma and begged him not to provoke a fight. Brushing him aside, Parasurāma turned furiously towards Rāma. Realising that he could not prevent the enraged Parasurāma from carrying out his threat, Dasaratha fainted like a serpent frightened by lightning and thunder. Ignoring Dasaratha, Parasurāma told Rāma, "The old bow belonging to Lord Siva which you broke had a crack. I will now tell you the true story of that bow. In days of yore, there used to be two big, incomparable bows (created by Viswakarma) shining like the sun, strong and

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indestructible like the Meru mountain. Of the two bows, Lord Siva owned one. The other bow was with Lord Tirumāl. The Devas wanted to know from Lord Brahma, which of these two bows was mightier and would emerge victorious. Lord Brahma 'conspired' to induce a fight between Lord Siva and Lord Tirumāl, both of whom were in reality one and the same. They both strung their respective bows and fought each other. The people of the seven worlds were frightened and even the eight directions got destabilised. The two fought ferociously with unabated fury. When finally the sturdy bow of Siva developed a crack, He became very angry. After a lull, the fight was resumed; but the Devas intervened and stopped the fight. Siva gave His mighty bow to Devendra. Tirumāl who was victorious in the fight, gave His bow to Sage Irisigan and left. This sage gave the bow to my father Jamadagni, who in turn gave it to me. This is that sturdy bow. You have been boasting about your might because you broke Siva's bow which had a crack. If you can bend this bow, I will concede that there is no king mightier than you and I will desist from fighting with you.

"O descendant of Manu, listen to something more! I have an old enmity with royalty. A long time ago, a cruel king had slain my irreproachable father even after being told that he had totally given up anger. This aroused my wrath. I therefore exterminated twentyone generations of crowned kings with the sharp edge of my fierce axe. I performed the rites of my deceased father not with water but with the blood flowing from the kings killed by me. Only then was I able to control my wrath. All the worlds I conquered have been gifted to Sage Kasyapa. After getting rid of my external enemies, I was doing penance at the Mahendra mountain to suppress my internal enemies like anger and passion, when the sound of your breaking Siva's bow reached my ears. I hurried here in great rage. I ask you first to bend this bow of Tirumāl. If you are strong enough, I will fight with you."

Rāma's face broke into a bright smile. He told Parasurāma, "Please give me the strong and victorious bow handled by Lord Nārayana." Taking that bow, Rāma bent it and pulled the string up to his shoulders, frightening Parasurāma of long matted locks. Addressing him, Rāma said, "You have destroyed the kings of this earth and their wards; even so you are the son of Sage Jamadagni who was a master of the Védas, and you have also been doing penance. Therefore, you shall not be killed. Yet, the arrow which I have fed into the bow cannot be wasted. Please tell me quickly what shall be the target of this arrow." Parasurāma replied, "O embodiment of justice, do not

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be angry with me. You are the Supreme Lord of this world. I have realised this only now. O holder of the Disc and wearer of a tulasi garland, the bow of Lord Siva is not even fit to be held by you. It gave way, afraid of your strength. O possessor of handsome feet adorned with a hero's golden anklets, you are none other than Mahāvishnu. What sorrow can there be for this world hereafter? Even the bow I have given to you, is no match for your extraordinary prowess. The arrow you propose to shoot need not go to waste; let it take away the benefits arising out of the penance I have done." Rāma immediately, released the arrow. It drew away all the flawless results of the penance done by Parasurāma and returned to him. Taking leave of Rāma, Parasurāma said, "O possessor of the complexion of pure sapphire! O incarnation of virtues whose divine feet all will be longing to attain! You will successfully complete whatever you wish to do. I take leave of you." Parasurāma then paid his respects to Rāma and left.

After Parasurāma's exit, Rāma with overflowing love for his father, Dasaratha, relieved him of his sorrow. *Recovering all his lost senses, Dasaratha, who had touched the bottom of the ocean of agony, now found himself in a shoreless ocean of ecstasy.* He embraced Rāma and bathed him with tears of joy. He then declared with pride, "Can anyone in the three worlds perform the heroic deeds which Rāma performed with such ease at this young age? This youth is none other than the Supreme Lord who can grant all pleasures in this birth and eternal salvation in the next." The Devas showered flowers from the sky. Rāma then called Varuna, gave him the fierce bow, and requested him to keep it safely. After that, accompanied by his jubilant army, Rāma reached the great city of Ayōdhya.

At Ayōdhya, one day, Dasaratha looked at Bharata and told him something which had not occurred to the latter. "Your grandfather, the monarch of the land of Kekaya longs to see you. Please proceed to Kekaya." Bharata paid obeisance to his father, and then placed the divine feet of Rāma over his head. Bharata who had no life of his own other than Rāma, took leave of him, as though only his body was going away leaving behind his life (Rāma). In a chariot drawn by horses with flowing manes, accompanied by his maternal uncle Udayajit, and brother, Satrughna, Bharata travelled for seven days and reached Kekaya which abounded in cool water. After Bharata left, Emperor Dasaratha ruled his vast kingdom in an irreproachable manner. We will hereafter narrate what took place as a sequel to the great penance done by the Devas.

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AYŌDHYA KĀNDAM

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1. DASARATHA CONFERS WITH HIS MINISTERS

Seated on a decorated elephant and fanned on either side by white silken chowries, and accompanied by the beat of huge drums, Dasaratha arrived at his council-hall. He asked the kings, servants and relatives to leave the place and stood alone like Mahāvishnu (the protector of the universe) in His celestial trance. Dasaratha, with his moon-like, royal, white umbrella standing sky high, ordered his ministers who were all wise like Brihaspati (Devendra's preceptor), to be ushered in. *Extolled as the fourth god along with the Trinity of Gods, Sage Vasishtha, who possessed the stature to command his emperor, arrived first.* The sage was followed by Dasaratha's ministers, all of whom were repositories of knowledge and wisdom, having mastered the ancient arts and the how and why of things. Casting away anger and other vices, they protected dharma. They had the strength to change the course of events if something evil was going to happen. *They were persons with sterling character, having mastered all the knowledge available in great books. They were so distinguished that they selected the right time and place for successfully accomplishing a task, and passed on the benefits of all their wisdom to their king. They always boldly gave the king such advice as they thought just and right. They were unafraid of the possible anger of the king that might endanger their own status or lives.*

Dasaratha's ministers knew the past as well as the present and the future. *They spoke their minds to their king without hiding anything. Like a physician, they examined the good and the bad and finally offered the king only what was good for him. Even though they were sixty thousand in number, they were all one in their desire to do good to Dasaratha.* They entered his court like the waves of the sea, made their obeisance to Sage Vasishtha the possessor of endless knowledge, and saluted their king. The ministers then sat in their respective places and received the grace of Dasaratha who was a master of all branches of knowledge. After looking at each one of his ministers, the emperor told them, "Please listen to me attentively. All of you are aware that with your help, I have been ruling this kingdom well, like my forefathers of the Solar dynasty, for the last sixty thousand years. Like women who assiduously protect their chastity, I have been protecting this great kingdom, doing good to its citizens. Now, for a change, I want to do good to my own life. The liberation which I have been looking forward to for a long time, is now in sight. Ruling this kingdom has all along been a heavy burden to me. Unlike the serpent Ādisesha, or the elephants

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supporting the eight directions, or the great mountains, I can no longer carry this weight. The noble rulers born in my dynasty had in their old age installed their sons to bear the burden of ruling the state and had gone to the forests to attain mōksha by destroying the cravings of the five senses.

"I have conquered my enemies in the terrestrial, celestial and nether worlds. When such has been my prowess can I go on living in fear of the three enemies (lust, anger and ignorance) which have secretly made their abode in me? *Have I not, with the help of the dainty-footed Kaikeyi as my charioteer, once trounced the ten chariots marshalled against me by the fierce Asura Campara? Is it difficult for such a person to defeat the five chariots ridden by the five fiends known as the five senses?* There are only three types of kings who have gone to heaven — those who have died boldly in the battlefield, those who have acquired great knowledge and received enlightenment and those who have renounced all material wealth realising that none of it would be of any use beyond this world. Is there anything that is more detrimental than hiding the fact that death is a certainty for anyone born in this world? Is it possible to cross the vast sea of birth without the help of the boat of renunciation? *Escaping from the huge prison of birth and death can only be done with the two mighty wings; renunciation that can bring heavenly bliss and clarity of mind that can show the path to renunciation.* What can be more pleasant than such emancipation? My mind has begun to seek release from the mundane cravings of the five senses which bring only unhappiness. Therefore I have ceased to consider this kingdom to be worth anything. I have been able to protect this world in a righteous manner, having obtained all of you as my ministers. Just as you helped me in this world, do help me to attain heaven also. It is only through penance that one can escape from the sins committed earlier. Giving up penance and continuing to rule the kingdom is like giving up nectar and taking poison. Sitting on the back of a mighty elephant and enjoying the cool shade of a royal umbrella is only an ephemeral joy. Having enjoyed it for several years, how can I derive pleasure from the same stale experience?

"I suffered mental agony for a long time because I had no children. Rāma was born to relieve me of that sorrow. I have now firmly decided to let Rāma take on the burden of ruling the kingdom. I do not want posterity to censure me with the words, 'Rāma's father neither died in the battlefield, nor did he renounce his kingdom'. Such a blemish would make my life worthless. *Because of my penance, Rāma was born as my son and I was able to see him marry the noble Seeta. I have now decided to see him*

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marry Goddess Earth, full of fine qualities! I will be going against dharma if I delay the coming together of Goddess Earth (none other than Goddess Lakshmi) and Rāma who is sought by her. Therefore, I am going to hand over this kingdom to Rāma and go to the forest and do penance to emancipate myself from this life of ignorance. What are your views? Please tell me."

The ministers were happy that Rāma would become their king. At the same time, shuddering to think of Dasaratha's departure, they felt sad and suffered like a cow that longed for two calves. Finally, they bowed to the will of providence and accepted the views of Dasaratha, not only because they felt that there could not be a greater act that would bring credit to him, but also because there could be none better than Rāma for the people of that vast land. Sage Vasishtha carefully considered the wishes of Dasaratha and the views of the ministers assembled in the court and said, "O king, who was there among all the distinguished scions of the Solar dynasty who obtained a son like Rāma? For a learned and knowledgeable person like you, what you have decided is right. What remains to be done by you, is the righteous act of renunciation. You have successfully performed all the yāgas meant for accruing punyam*. Hereafter it is but proper that you go to the forest and do penance. Rāma is there to rule the kingdom properly and to remove any feeling that this beautiful Goddess Earth has lost her eyes because of your departure.

"There is nothing else for us to say except that Rāma (who is the very incarnation of Lord Mahāvishnu) is capable of effectively integrating all the acts of the Trinity of Gods. Mahālakshmi as well as Goddess Earth will claim that Rāma alone is their protector. *To say that he is good for your life is inadequate because Rāma is good for all living beings in this world.* All those who utter the sacred name of Rāma will get rid of their sorrow. It is only because of this divine quality of his that the sages as well as all others feel that Rāma is the reward for their righteous acts. Seeta of name and fame is greater than Goddess Earth (Nilamagal). Seeta is in fact greater than the daughter of the arts, namely Saraswati (Kalaimagal). Irrespective of whether they are scholars or not, all persons love Rāma more than even the water that they drink, or their own lives. O king, there is no one equal to Rāma in protecting the terrestrials, celestials and others from grief. Because of these qualities of Rāma there is nothing that is better for you than to relinquish everything and do penance."

** The antonym of sin is 'punyam' for which there is no exact word in English.*

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Listening to the words of Sage Vasishtha, Dasaratha became very happy, happier than he was on the day he obtained Rāma as his son, or when Rāma broke Lord Siva's mighty bow, or when Rāma defeated Parasurāma. With tears of joy, he made obeisance to Sage Vasishtha and said, "O great sage, you speak so sweetly. When I was able to withstand the burden of ruling this kingdom with the help of your grace, it will not be impossible for Rāma either!" The faultless Sage Vasishtha who had performed great penance did not reply. Sumantira, the chief among the ministers looked at them. Trying to convey the thoughts reflected on their faces, Sumantira stood before Dasaratha with folded hands and said, "While we are happy that Rāma's right to rule the state is recognised, we are scorched by your words that you would be discarding this kingdom and leaving us. We know very well that it is not proper for you to give up dharma which was never forsaken by your forefathers. *What an irony of fate that nothing in this world is harsher than dharma!* Please do make all the kings, sages, ministers and the people of the kingdom roar for joy, by installing your first son as the king of this land and then go and do penance." Dasaratha agreed that it would be right to do penance only after Rāma's coronation, and asked Sumantira to fetch Rāma the husband of Seeta at once!

Sumantira got into a golden chariot, sped past the streets full of huge mansions and finally entered Rāma's beautiful palace. He found Rāma in the company of that nectar amongst women, Seeta. Rāma's inseparable brother, Lakshmana, holding a fierce bow stood pleasantly by his side. Looking at this beautiful spectacle, Sumantira's eyes and mind were like bees consuming honey. With folded hands, he told Rāma that he was wanted by Dasaratha. The lotus-eyed Rāma got into Sumantira's huge chariot. As Rāma proceeded towards Dasaratha's palace, drums thundered and the sound of music was heard everywhere. The streets swarmed with women on whose forearms conch bangles noisily jingled. The celestials shouted that their sorrow was over. Manmatha's arrows filled the place. *The flood of infatuation which women had for Rāma, crossed the dam of their modesty.* These deer-like women filled the streets with gay abandon. The whole place including gateways with mighty pillars, was strewn with lotus flowers, ear-rings and locks of hair. The flower garland adorning Rāma's mountainous dark cloud-like chest, 'contained' humming bees, and the fish-like eyes of women and their coyness. When women with cloud-like hair and faces humbling the moon, saw Rāma, flowers fell from their hair, and pearl-like tears fell from their lily-black eyes. Like stars falling from the sky, flowers fell from the women standing in the balconies and filled the streets. All the men looked at Rāma,

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as if they were calves looking at their mother cow. Riding the chariot brought by Sumantira, Rāma along with Lakshmana, reached the place where happy Dasaratha was. After making obeisance to the great Sage Vasishtha, Rāma prostrated himself at the lotus feet of Dasaratha, who in turn embraced him with tears of joy. *To say that Dasaratha embraced Rāma would be an understatement! It would be more appropriate to say that Dasaratha, wanting to assess the capabilities of Rāma in bearing this world, tried to measure with his chest and shoulders, the mountain-like shoulders and chest of Rāma, the dwelling place of Lakshmi.*

Making Rāma sit by his side, Dasaratha affectionately looked at his son and said, "O possessor of shoulders that dwarfed the fame of Parasurāma! There is something that needs to be done by you urgently. Relentless old age has made me considerably weak. You must help me to come out of the prison of ruling this kingdom. I want to do great penance which alone can save me. It is customary for the elders to say that only begetting the right type of sons can help them get rid of sorrow and attain happiness both in this life and the next one. Is it then proper for me to suffer when I have a son like you, an embodiment of dharma? If you wish to fulfil the duties of a son, listen to me. Our forefathers protected themselves from the ravages of the five senses, when they became old, by making their sons take over the burden of ruling the state. I am blessed with you as my son because of the good deeds I did in my last birth and the yāgas I performed in this one. With you as my son, why should I continue to suffer the burden of ruling the kingdom? I wish to get out of this unhappiness and go to heaven. You have to fulfil my desire. Long ago, Bhageeratha, realising that his forefathers — the sons of Sagara — did not possess the requisite merit to enter heaven, brought the River Ganga to this world, emancipated them through its sacred waters and made it possible for them to enter heaven. You must know that it is not the emperors, nor the Devas, nor Devendra, nor even those who have done great penance, who have freed themselves from sorrow. *It is only those blessed with sons who do not disobey them, that are free from sorrow!* Because of these utterances of mine, do not think that I am craftily passing on the burden of this kingdom to you. Do think of wearing this great crown of our race to protect dharma. That is what I expect from you." *Rāma, who listened to the words of his father, was neither after power nor averse to it.* He thought, "Is it not my duty to do what has been ordered by my king after careful thought? Therefore I have to rule the kingdom." When Rāma agreed to do the bidding of his father, Dasaratha was happy and embraced him. Taking leave of him, and getting into the big chariot driven by Sumantira, Rāma returned to his huge palace

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followed by his admirers, great sages and kings. Dasaratha soon sent out invitations etched in gold with the seal of Garuda to all the victorious kings and requested Sage Vasishtha to supervise the task of making appropriate preparations for the crowning of Rāma. Thereafter, Vasishtha got into a chariot and left with other sages.

Dasaratha looked at the kings who were by his side and said, "All this wealth and the kingdom are for Rāma. I am obsessed with the single thought of passing on everything to him in a proper manner." Those who heard the words of Dasaratha appeared like persons intoxicated with sweet wine absorbed through their ears. Their happiness spread through the roots of their hair. They felt as if they were transported, along with their bodies, to the celestial world. They all had only one wish. Rāma should become the king. Each one of them felt that he had got the kingdom for himself. They bowed several times before Dasaratha and told him affectionately that his decision was proper. They said that his handing over of the kingdom to the heroic Rāma, the vanquisher of the mighty Parasurāma, was an act of dharma.

Dasaratha was very happy when he found his kings welcoming his decision unanimously. Wanting to measure the depth of their feelings, Dasaratha asked them, "Dear kings, out of my infatuation for my son, I have expressed my desire to crown him. I wish to know whether you approve of my action out of emotion, or because you think I am right." The kings replied, "Please listen to us and know how each one of the citizens of this kingdom loves your great son of excellent qualities. Rāma has all the qualities — charity, dharma, character, truthfulness and the habit of worshipping noble people — which are needed for a ruler to enrich his kingdom. Is there anyone who would spurn a pond full of useful water, or a tree that gives plenty of shade, or clouds which give copious rain, or an overflowing river which waters the fields? O mighty king, please know that the great love that Rāma has for all living beings in your kingdom is reciprocated by them." Dasaratha was elated by the words of the kings. Overflowing with emotion, he felt as if his woes had come to an end. With tears of joy, he told them, "You are all kings who have elevated yourselves to great heights by your impartiality, good deeds and dharma. Why should you consider Rāma as my son? Accept him as your son and look upon him as one."

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2. MANTARAI'S MACHINATIONS

Dasaratha went into another large hall along with expert astrologers and asked them to fix a proper date for the coronation of Rāma. Women who came to know of Dasaratha's decision became ecstatic. With loose robes and flowing hair they ran for joy. Still their slender waists did not break. Four of them, dancing happily, bowed with folded hands before everyone they came across, and finally reached Kausalya, the mother of the dark-complexioned Rāma. Looking at them with love, she said, "Dear ones! Seeing you, it is evident that you have some pleasant news to offer. Please tell me what it is." They told her, "Emperor Dasaratha has decided to crown your great son king of this land." *On hearing these words, a sea of happiness flooded Kausalya's mind. At the same time the thought that her beloved husband was going to renounce his kingdom gave her great sorrow. Like a hot and sandy desert, it dried up the sea of happiness.* After giving away exquisite necklaces to the four women who conveyed the tidings of her son's coronation, Kausalya went to the temple of Mahāvishnu along with her beloved Sumitra (mother of Lakshmana) and worshipped the lotus feet of the Lord. *Kausalya who had great penance to her credit had borne Mahāvishnu, who in turn had borne the entire universe in His belly. She now stood before that very Mahāvishnu and pleaded, "O Lord, it is up to you to do good to Rāma who is born to me as my son."* After worshipping the Lord, as mentioned in the four Vēdas, Kausalya left the temple and gave away cows with calves to all the great sages.

The expert astrologers told Dasaratha that the propitious time for performing Rāma's coronation was the next day. Listening to their sweet words, Dasaratha said, "Let the great Sage Vasishtha, who is like a panacea for all ills, come here." On Vasishtha's arrival, Dasaratha made his obeisance and told the sage, "The auspicious day for crowning Rāma is tomorrow. Please perform the required rituals for the coronation." Vasishta (his enthusiasm overtaking him) soon entered Rāma's palace. After being pleasantly received by him Vasishtha, who was capable of unflagging penance, looked at Rāma and said, "Your father who has great affection for you has decided to hand over the right of ruling this kingdom to you tomorrow. I have some good things to tell you. Please listen to them carefully and follow them properly. Sages are superior to the Trinity of Gods and are more sublime than the five elements and even truth! Therefore, be kind to them. Dear son, there are countless Devas who have suffered at the hands of angry sages and an equal number of Devas who have become great by receiving their compassion. Worship the sages and do their bidding.

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Remember that even fate awaits their fiat and it is good for one to extol them in this birth as well as the next one.

"Giving up the three cardinal virtues, namely, righteousness, sincerity, and compassion, will do no good even to the Trinity of Gods, more so to a king. Noble son, you do not indulge in gambling or other vices. Still, I want you to know that a person slips mainly because of these faults. Only after a king has reached a stage when he ceases to have enemies can he expect no further wars in his country. Neither will his fame diminish then, nor will his army dwindle. *Dear son! Controlling the desires that seek entry into a person through the five senses, collecting and augmenting in a just manner the resources required for a kingdom and ruling steadfastly with impartiality are the only methods by which one can rule a kingdom properly. Of course, such a rule is as difficult as doing penance standing on the tip of a sword! Even if a king possesses the combined strength of the Trinity of Gods, the king's real strength lies in his acting on the advice of his ministers.*

"Whether for earthly mortals or for others, what is the use of merely controlling the five senses? What is most important is compassion (anbu). In all the three worlds, there is nothing more powerful than compassion. For a king who is strong enough to withstand any hardship for the sake of the welfare of the people, and for a king who does not swerve from the path of dharma and truth, there is no need even to perform yāgas. Do you think any harm can come to a king who always uses kind words, who is full of charity, who will examine everything and only then act, who is efficient, whose private and public life are clean, and who is just and great? A king who holds everything even, like a scale's needle, should give his attention only to the considered advice of his ministers and noble persons. Realising that the words of these virtuous ones soaked in unimpeachable conduct have great power, the king should show them compassion. The love and goodwill returned by these good persons will act like a powerful weapon for the king. There is one more thing about which a ruler must be watchful — the lust for beautiful women. This is as bad for the king as a comet in the sky is for the world. There is neither misery nor hell for the king who avoids such lust."

The great Sage Vasishtha then took Rāma to the temple of Mahāvishnu. After worshipping the Lord resting on the celestial serpent Ādisesha, Vasishtha chanted the four Védas and bathed Rāma in sacred water. Vasishtha then spread out a pile of sacred grass and made Rāma sit on it after proper rituals. Later, the sage went to

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Dasaratha personally and told him that all the formalities for the coronation had been completed. Dasaratha ordered that the city be decorated forthwith. Commanded by the king, drum-beaters moving everywhere announced that the whole city be decorated as, the very next day, Rāma would crown himself by marrying Goddess Earth (Nilamagal). Listening to this, even the Devas became happy. The news that Rāma would start ruling the kingdom, was sweet nectar to the citizens of Ayōdhya. They sang and danced for joy. Sweating in excitement, they extolled Dasaratha and gave away riches to all those who brought the pleasant tidings of Rāma's coronation. As if improving the shine of the sun's rays, or augmenting the splendour of Tirumāl's Kaustubham, the people of Ayōdhya beautified the already beautiful city. Flags were seen all over as though a variety of birds had converged on Ayōdhya to watch the coronation of Rāma. The city was decorated with plantain trees resembling the thighs of women, arecanut trees resembling their necks, garlands of pearls resembling their lustrous teeth and golden pots resembling their breasts. Huge pillars of red gems partially covered with white cloth appeared like Lord Siva with the sacred ash on His forehead. A portion of the city decorated with pearls resembled the full moon. Another portion of the city decorated with padmarāga (crimson) stones shone like the morning sun. Yet another portion of the city decorated with blue stones gave the effect of darkness. Chariots drawn by galloping horses resembled celestial chariots. Huge rutting elephants with face-plates looked like the eastern mountains moving with the incomparable rising sun. The crimson stones embedded in the crystal walls of the extensive city of Ayōdhya were so bright that no darkness was experienced and no twilight was seen in the sky. Streets full of mansions saw a downpour of unique rain which was a combination of flowers, scented water, scented powder and gold dust from the ornaments of people moving close to one another. The display of riches, beauty, and pleasures made the Devas who came to witness the coronation of Rāma mistake Ayōdhya for the celestial world. They wondered whether they were still in their own world!

It was then that the hunch-backed Mantarai (who was like the embodiment of the sins of Rāvana) came out and learnt why the city was decorated. She became furious. Possessing the capacity to cause grief to the three worlds, Mantarai's eyes spat fire and she uttered harsh words remembering an old incident when Rāma as a child had shot a ball of mud at her with his bow. The hunch-backed Mantarai, known as Kooni, rushed to Kaikeyi who was sleeping on a couch (like a coral creeper or a lotus lying on the ocean of milk) with compassion in her eyes and wearing the nine gems from the four seas. The wicked Kooni, looking like Kétu, touched Kaikeyi's slender feet.

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Even before the chaste and divine Kaikeyi shook off the sleep that lingered in her long eyes, Kooni said, "You are like the cool white moon totally unaware of the danger it faces when it is about to be swallowed by the serpent Rāhu. You sleep unconcerned, ignorant of the great sorrow about to overtake you in the near future." *Listening to the venomous Kooni, Kaikeyi replied, "My four sons capable of destroying their foes are doing well without swerving from the path of dharma. What grief can come to me when I am so fortunate? Anyone who has children possessing noble qualities liberally extolled by others will achieve only good things. When I have a son like Rāma* who is like the Védas for the entire world, how can anything bad happen to me?"* Instantly, Kooni said, "Your welfare and prosperity have been destroyed. Kausalya is going to live well because of her intelligence." Kaikeyi replied, *"Kausalya has Emperor Dasaratha as her husband and Bharata* who has attained great fame and name as her son. What more does Kausalya need in her life?"* Kooni said, "Rāma who brought discredit to masculinity by killing Tātakai, a woman, is going to be crowned tomorrow. This is what Kausalya is going to achieve." *The mind of Kaikeyi who heard these words was not different from the mind of Kausalya who had all virtues including chastity. This could be because Dasaratha had made the heart of Kaikeyi his abode and stayed there! Kaikeyi who had great affection for Rāma, overflowed with happiness as soon as she learnt of his coronation. Her face which was like the full moon became brighter and she gave Kooni a gem necklace which shone so brightly that it excelled even the sun.*

Kooni was furious. She shouted and used offensive language. Her small eyes emitted fire. She sighed. She threw her dress helter-skelter and wailed aloud. Finally she flung the necklace away with such force that it made a pit on the ground. Kooni who caused agony to others, looked at Kaikeyi and said, "You are stupid and mad. You are welcome to a lifetime of misery along with the son born to you; but I am not going to be a slave to the servants of Kausalya. Your son will have to be standing on the ground while the dark Rāma will be seated with the red-lipped Seeta on a lofty throne. How are you going to accept this lowly status for your son? After that, will anything good happen to you? Because Kausalya has not forgotten to look after her interests, her son Rāma will become the king. Your son Bharata, even after losing the kingdom has not given up his life. He exists, with no distinction, for the

** Before Kaikeyi's mind was poisoned by Kooni there was so much love between Kausalya and Kaikeyi that Kaikeyi considered Rāma as her son and Bharata as Kausalya's son! In one stroke, Kamban brings forth this relationship in a remarkable manner.*

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only fault of being born to you. Bharata is as good as unborn even though he is born in this world! If Rāma and Lakshmana are going to rule this kingdom, it would be better to send Bharata and Satrughna to the forest to do penance. What a pity! It is not given to that handsome Bharata, who is like a decorated rutting elephant, to be born as a person fit to be counted as one among the galaxy of mighty kings. I feel it is better for him to die than to live. Only now do I understand fully the significance of that unfortunate Bharata being sent in such haste to the kingdom of Kekaya." Addressing Bharata who was not there, Mantarai continued, "O Bharata, what will you do hereafter? Discarding his impartiality and gifting away the kingdom to Rāma, Dasaratha has been treacherous to you. To my father-like Bharata, even the mother has become wicked by tolerating this act of Dasaratha!" Reverting to Kaikeyi, Mantarai said, "You were born in a royal family and were brought up in a palace. You married a king and lived like a queen. All that is gone. Soon you are going to fall into a shoreless sea of sorrow. I am only asking you to save yourself from such a calamity; but you refuse to listen to me. At least now do you realise the truth of what I say? Bharata's assets, his education, youth, strength, skilful archery, handsomeness and bravery, stand wasted like nectar poured on grass."

The harsh and bitter words uttered by Mantarai, fanned Kaikeyi's rising fury, making her flare up like fire into which fuel is fed. *With her kayal-like eyes with exotic red lines, Kaikeyi glared at Mantarai and said, "You wicked woman! The great kings born in the Solar dynasty would never give up the just and righteous path even if they have to lose their lives and riches.* Low thinking alone has made you cast aspersions on this great race that has come from Manu himself! You are not one who is going to do good either to me or to Bharata. Nor are you going to do good to yourself for the sake of dharma. *You stupid woman! It is ill fate that has prompted you to say what appeared good to your mind alone. The only thing that a human being who is born in this world gains or loses at the end of life is fame. Even if there is going to be a change in the colour or course of justice and rectitude, or change in the result of one's penance and impeccable heroism, is it proper to swerve from the path of family tradition?* You have lost your good sense. Get out of my sight. I have tolerated you patiently without cutting off, or burning your despicable tongue which has uttered base words. If anyone outside this hall were to hear what you have said, you would be considered guilty of having spoken unjust words which deserve punishment. Stop with what you have uttered so far and seal your mouth."

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Kaikeyi's words did not frighten Mantarai. Instead of leaving, she prostrated herself at Kaikeyi's feet and continued, "Dear creeper-like lady! Even your anger will not stop me from telling you what is positively good for you. If the right to rule the kingdom should belong to one who is older, then don't you think the blue, sea-like Rāma is younger to Emperor Dasaratha? When the emperor has agreed to crown this Rāma, how is it proper to exclude the younger prince, Bharata? Even lofty sages who are full of penance and renunciation will change their minds once they acquire riches which are difficult to obtain. Though you and Bharata have not been troubled so far by Kausalya and Rāma, they will change once they acquire the kingdom, and will torment you both to such a degree that you will finally die of agony. If Rāma is to rule, then the whole world will belong to his mother Kausalya who is always jealous of the growth of others. Once that happens, what will you and your son Bharata have for yourselves, except what little is doled out by Kausalya? How will you please those hungry people who come to you with a begging-bowl? Will you go to Kausalya and get from her the extra wealth required to satisfy those suffering beggars? Or will you say 'no' to them? Or will you give up your life, ashamed of your helplessness in removing their hardship? How are you going to live? If your father, mother, relations, or those belonging to your clan come to you with the hope of making good their wants, what is it they would be seeking except Kausalya's wealth? Just think of it.

"King Janaka, the father of that Seeta with fruit-like lips, has not so far destroyed your father only because he is afraid of your loving husband, Dasaratha. Once the way is clear, do you think your father will have a peaceful life? You senseless woman! Don't you realise that your father has enemies other than Janaka? Once these enemies come to attack him, if Rāma and others do not go to his help, how can your father achieve victory? With the destruction of all your relatives, you will be drowned in a sea of sorrow. You alone are responsible for preventing your deserving son, Bharata, from getting the kingdom. After Rāma, this kingdom offered to him by Dasaratha, will be passed on to the sons of Rāma and his inseparable brother, Lakshmana. Will that kingdom ever go to others?"

Kaikeyi's pure mind underwent a change after listening to the words of wicked Mantarai because of the spell of the Devas and the great penance performed by the sages! The truthful Kaikeyi, who was accustomed to uttering pure and noble words and was like a pleasant deer, discarded all her natural grace as if prompted by the sins of the Rākshasās and the dharma of others! *Is it not because of the heartless nature of*

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such a transformed Kaikeyi that all over the world everyone still imbibes and savours the omnipresent nectar of the age-old greatness of Rāma?

Kaikeyi now looked approvingly at Kooni (full of machinations) and told her, "You alone love me. You alone are good to my son. Tell me how Bharata can be crowned instead of Rāma." After listening to Kaikeyi whose eyes were shining like a split tender mango, Mantarai said, "My good friend has now become clever! My companion has become wise!" Prostrating herself at Kaikeyi's feet, Mantarai continued, "My dear damsel with a pearly smile, do as I say and the seven worlds above and the seven worlds below will belong only to your son. Ask for the two boons promised by your husband when Camparāsura was slain in battle." The hunch-backed Kooni whose thoughts, too, were crooked, continued, "Seek the kingdom for Bharata, as one of the two boons. Use the other boon to make Rāma leave the kingdom and roam for fourteen years in the forest. This is how you can make Bharata the sole monarch of this vast world." Kaikeyi became happy. She gave Kooni ample riches and a necklace embedded with nine gems. Embracing her, Kaikeyi said, "You have given this huge world to my son. Henceforth you shall be mother to Bharata who will be the lord of this world. I assure you that if Bharata is not crowned, and Rāma is not driven to the forest, I will give up my life in the presence of the king. You may now go."

3. THE EVIL DESIGNS OF KAIKEYI

After Kooni's departure, Kaikeyi came down from her flowery couch. She tore away the white jasmine flowers tucked in her long, thick, jet-black hair, as if she were tearing away the moon from a mass of black clouds. She threw the flowers helter-skelter on the floor. *She tore away her shining jewels and discarded them, as if she were uprooting the plant of her growing fame and casting it away.* Removing her anklets and bangles, she threw them also on the floor. Even the decoration on her bright forehead was wiped away by her as though she were removing the 'black spot' from the moon. Like a bare plant after shaking off all its flowers, like a deer that had fallen flat, like a peacock sleeping after a playful dance, Kaikeyi fell on the floor with tears in her eyes. She rolled on the floor and transmitted the fragrance of musk and sandalwood paste from her hair to it. Seeing her lying on the floor, one would think that having learnt of Seeta's imminent departure to the forest, her mother (Mother Earth) had come all the way to Ayōdhya and was lying there.

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At midnight, followed by many kings amidst great fanfare, Dasaratha reached the mansion of Kaikeyi whose words were sweeter than the yāzh. Taking leave of the kings who had accompanied him to the entrance, Dasaratha came to the soft-shouldered Kaikeyi of vél-like eyes. On seeing her, he was shocked. He wondered what grief had come over her. Like an elephant lifting a deer with its trunk, he tried to lift her with his huge arms. Brushing aside the hands of the king, Kaikeyi the very life of Dasaratha fell back on the floor. She sighed deeply without uttering a word. The king became frightened and asked her, "What has happened? Whoever it be in these seven worlds who has spoken to you disparagingly, will be slain by me. Do tell me what happened." With tears falling on her breasts from her long cloudy eyes, Kaikeyi replied, "If you have any compassion for me, grant me the two boons that you had promised me long ago." Dasaratha laughed loudly flashing his sparkling teeth and said, "I shall ungrudgingly give you whatever you want. *I promise you this in the name of your charitable son Rāma."* Kaikeyi replied, "If it is true that you are going to relieve me of my grief, then let the gods be my witness. O king, please give me the two boons now." Dasaratha told her, "There is no need for so much anxiety or sorrow on your part to obtain the boons I had promised you. I shall give them to you right now."

Kaikeyi, more treacherous than anything considered treacherous hitherto, said, "Ensure that my son Bharata shall rule this world; and that Seeta's husband Rāma shall rule the forest." The tongue of Kaikeyi was like the fang of a cobra. Dasaratha trembled as if poison had spread throughout his body. He fell flat like an elephant bitten by a poisonous snake. None could describe the excruciating agony he suffered as he fell and rolled on the floor. His agony was such that the hot breath that came out of him was like the flame that issues forth from the burning fire blown by a goldsmith. His tongue became dry. His life began to ebb. He was depressed. He shed tears of blood. All his five senses lost their balance and forgot their functions. Suffering untold agony, Dasaratha sat for some time and then got up. After a while, he fell again and stood still like a portrait. Approaching Kaikeyi, he wanted to dash her against the floor. Again, thinking of the discredit he would bring on himself for having harmed a woman, he paused and suffered like a strong elephant whose wound was pierced by a forcefully hurled spear. Furious that he could not harm Kaikeyi because she was a woman, he moved about angrily and suffered like one who had lost his sight. The Devas shivered with fear to see Dasaratha behave like a rutting elephant tied to a kamba (pillar) and weep helplessly in agony. Kaikeyi, however, was absolutely unmoved. She neither softened, nor was she ashamed of herself. Dasaratha looked intently at her and asked,

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"Have you lost your senses? Or has some wicked person taught you to be treacherous? I command you to tell me the truth." Kaikeyi immediately replied, "I have neither lost my senses, nor have I been taught by anyone. If you give me the boons you promised me, I shall accept them; otherwise, I shall give up my life, casting the blame on you."

Even before the senseless Kaikeyi concluded her harsh words, Dasaratha who had no life without Rāma, lost his equilibrium like one whose wound had been pierced by a burning spear, and fell again onto the floor. "O wicked woman!" he shouted and gave out a deep sigh. *"Dharma is too harsh. Let truth die," he cried.* He tried to get up, and unable to stand, collapsed again. The heroic Dasaratha (who had defeated several heroes) cursed womankind, swearing, "I shall exterminate all women in this world with my sharp sword and join the blemished ones." Dasaratha who was famous all over the world for upholding truth, thumped his palm with his fist in a helpless manner. *He gnashed his teeth muttering that it was a crime to utter truth.* Dasaratha, the apostle of truth, thought, "It is wrong to either punish this woman or let down truth by refusing to give her the two boons promised to her." Slowly he stood up, deciding, "It is better to entreat than slay her." Dasaratha, at whose magnificent feet kings competed to fall, fell at the feet of Kaikeyi! He pleaded, "Your son, Bharata, will not agree to rule even if I offer him the kingdom. The people of this world will not accept him even if Bharata agrees. You will therefore never attain fame and name. Why should you needlessly invite censure from the world? Even the Devas will not agree to Rāma going to the forest and Bharata ruling the kingdom. The people of this world as well as those belonging to the nether world will not be willing to live after being separated from him. With whose help can you rule the kingdom when all the three worlds are not willing to be without Rāma? It is only because of my persuasion that he agreed to rule the kingdom. If he were to know your mind, he would himself offer the kingdom to your son.

"O dear daughter of the king of Kekaya, even if you want my very eyes, I am bound to give them to you. If you must have your boon, take the kingdom; but forget the other boon. Having promised you the boons, I will never go back on my word. Do not therefore give me sorrow by pressing me for them. Even the fiery-eyed devil melts and grants requests. Will you ever be blamed if you give up the other boon as requested by me?" Dasaratha, the vanquisher of his enemies in the battlefield, implored Kaikeyi in several ways with words like these. But the unparalleled, cruel Kaikeyi did not yield. She said, "You have already promised to give me the two boons I asked. O king, if you lose your temper instead of giving them, who is there to protect truth in this world hereafter?" Dasaratha who always spoke only the truth lost all his

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strength and became weak when he heard this. He appeared not to breathe for some time with the thought, "This female form seems to be a combination of poison and fire." Then he begged of her and said, "Let the whole of this country be ruled by you and your son! I will not go back on my words. All that I want from you is that you agree to Rāma staying here because he is my vision, my life. *I feel sad that the very truth that I have been upholding all along has become the cause of my destruction.* My tongue has become dry. I will not live if Rāma disappears from my sight. Consequently my life itself stands surrendered to you." Dasaratha's entreaties did not touch Kaikeyi. Her anger remained unabated. She hardened like a tree. She did not worry about the blame that would fall on her. She told Dasaratha, "O possessor of a surfeit of arrows, don't you see that denying me the boons you have promised me will only display your obstinacy and is against dharma?"

Wicked Kaikeyi's words made noble Dasaratha say, "I shall give up my life if Rāma leaves for the forest without being crowned." He fell on the floor like a mountain struck by thunder, and sank in a shoreless sea of deep sorrow. Dasaratha whose heart was broken by Kaikeyi's words, rolled on the floor thinking again and again of the wicked nature of her mind. He addressed her in anguish: "Women adorned with bangles always felt that it was a distinction to die before their husbands whose lives they considered more valuable than their own. To this day I have never seen one who would kill her husband. You wicked woman, will you kill me? You have not thought of your crime, or great family tradition, or dharma. You have pitilessly killed compassion from within and you are about to kill me by your sharp words. You are going to kill the people of this world without concerning yourself about the sins you are committing. *Only those who do not swerve from the path of magnanimity, and who consider shyness, humility and fear to be their ornaments, are entitled to be called women.* Those women who do not realise the beauty of feminine timidity can only be considered males, and are women in form alone. Should the world comment that though I conquered kings and all those respected for their physical strength, including the Devas, I finally met my end through a woman living in my house as my wife?"

The great Dasaratha, of mighty shoulders, muttering words of despondency and sighing deeply, was a picture of misery. He would sink into different kinds of sorrow which were unconnected with one another. He would swoon, making one wonder whether he was alive! Dasaratha's handsome shoulders were completely covered with dust as he kept rolling on the floor. At this stage, stony–hearted Kaikeyi told Dasaratha, "O great king, assure me that the boons I have sought are mine or else I

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shall give up my life." Kaikeyi was like fire which can destroy the sweet life of a person without moving from its place. She added, "Once upon a time the great Emperor Sibi cut his own body and gave it away for protecting truth. Coming from his race, what purpose do you serve by grudging me the boons promised to me?" The mighty Dasaratha, who heard this, thought, "This wicked woman will give up her life if I do not grant her the boons she has sought." Out of desperation he told her, "All right, I grant you the boons you seek. Take them. Let my son rule the forest. Let me die and go to heaven and rule there. I warn you that you will be caught, along with your son Bharata, in a sea of censure and struggle, swimming for long, unable to reach the shore." Even before completing his words Dasaratha fell unconscious, pierced by the sharp sword of grief. Kaikeyi full of happiness as a result of her 'victory', slept unconcerned!

Observing Kaikeyi's total indifference to her husband's agony, the maiden of 'cool night' disappeared quickly as though ashamed of being a witness to the sight. Simulating the sound of ankle-bells of narrow-waisted women, the birds that arose from lakes and trees in the morning made a peculiar sound which appeared to curse venomous and wicked Kaikeyi. Even the elephants after a good night's rest got up in the morning looking forlorn, wanting to leave the land for good, knowing that Rāma would soon be going to the forest along with the beautiful young Seeta. As if the canopy of the sky was dismantled, the stars disappeared. The exit of the night (usually associated with the havoc wrought by cupid's arrows) was followed by the beating of drums announcing the arrival of the day of Rāma's crowning. The sound woke up women and made them rise earlier than their husbands, like a herd of peacocks awakened by the thunder of clouds from the mountain. The morning breeze mixed with the fragrance of flowers, annoyed a few women as they had to rise from their sleep with their loose attire and ornaments slipping off. The breeze also disturbed a few maidens from their pleasant but false dreams in which each one of them was in the 'company' of Rāma. *Like good women who kept their mouths shut, huge red flowers shocked at Kaikeyi's treachery, refused to open their petals on that morning.* 'Hooded serpents', in the form of rich music entered the ears of women who had become weak due to their growing lust fed by the arrows of Manmatha, the moon in the sky and the northern wind.

Men with liberal and large hands felt that this was a fine day for them because it was Rāma's coronation day — the day on which Goddess Lakshmi, the seven worlds and the eyes that had done penance would confer their benediction. They cursed the

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night for obstructing the advent of this auspicious day and felt that it was too long like the unending pralaya night! Women with long and attractive eyes, like shining véls greased with ghee, were lying on their beds, feigning sleep and thinking only of Rāma. These women did not, however, sleep for long. They forced themselves out of their beds spread with flowers, in their anxiety to see Rāma's glistening body. Restless husbands cast away their ornaments to avoid hurting the bosoms of their wives whom they were eager to join. The pleasant chirping of birds and humming of bees could be heard everywhere. Garlands of flowers bloomed all around. The thunder of huge war-drums, the pleasant clink of pearls clashing with necklaces, the music from the yāzh, the roar of the rolling chariots and the clatter of the hooves of horses running faster than even the mind, could be heard all over the citadel of Ayōdhya. Like the ebbing of the five senses of the heroic, truthful and charitable Dasaratha, grieving about the impending separation from his son, the nocturnal lights lost their brightness. *Music from different types of flutes, songs in praise of Rāma, the beat of the drums known as pampai, the tinkle of dancing-bells, and the blare of white conches and long horns, along with the music of Sāma Véda, rent the air.* The lights in the mansions lost their lustre. The thick smoky darkness seemed to flee like an enemy, as the sun rose from the eastern mountain red with anger because Dasaratha a scion of the Solar dynasty was being tormented by Kaikeyi. Lotus flowers bloomed prematurely like the faces of the beautiful women eager to see the magnificent sight of the coronation of Rāma who had broken Lord Siva's bow. As the day of the coronation dawned, excited by their love for Rāma and full of enthusiasm and gaiety, the people of Ayōdhya, assembled early in the morning in large numbers like the seven seas merging into one. Though it is difficult for us to imagine or describe the doings of those who came to witness the coronation, let us try to do so to the extent possible.

All the young women of Ayōdhya (who could attract men possessing the bearing of elephants) joyfully decorated their feet with the paste of red flowers, wore bangles made of white conches, applied black collyrium to their sharp eyes and tucked fresh flowers into their hair. *Shedding tears of joy, all the young men (sporting shoulders which still contained the kunkumam from the breasts of intoxicated women possessing red fish-like eyes with impeccable faces looking like lotus flowers) appeared to be the brothers of Rāma. All the chaste married women of Ayōdhya, brimming with happiness as though it was their son who was to be crowned, looked like Kausalya. Women who were unmarried, experienced the joy of Seeta, while Seeta herself looked like Goddess Lakshmi. All the elderly men felt as if they were Dasaratha. Sages who chanted the*

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Védas were like Vasishtha himself! Like the Devas assembling in large numbers to consume the nectar of immortality, innumerable kings, anxious to see the crowning of Rāma, poured into Ayōdhya. The beautiful streets of Ayōdhya were full of lovely women with coral lips and heavy bosoms. Crowds of men assembled everywhere, each one asking the other to move forward, without moving from his place! None of them could either step forward or go back because of the extremely crowded streets. *Some claimed that the kings who had arrived were more in number, a few claimed that the warriors were greater in number. Some felt that men were greater in number, while a few others felt that women were greater in number. Some asserted that those who had already assembled were greater in number, while some others asserted that the ones who were yet to enter Ayōdhya were greater in number! Each one believed that what he or she saw was greater in number than what the rest of them saw. Who was there who had seen the vast crowd in its entirety?*

With the loveliness of a lily and the fierceness of a vél, with large collyrium coated eyes and slender waists, women resembling the silvery moon gathered everywhere like a herd of peacocks dancing with their feathers spread. The only ones who were not fortunate enough to be there, were the Rākshasās of Lanka and the rutting elephants guarding the eight directions. Exalted kings ruling vast kingdoms and comparable only to Devendra, were present with their pearl-white royal umbrellas held high. The white chowries used for fanning these kings, looked like a flock of swans come to witness the coronation. *Such was the grandeur of the kings who entered the hall where Rāma's coronation was due to take place.* As though they had come to perform the marriage of their own beloved sons whom they had brought up with great affection, brahmins well versed in the Védas entered the hall with immense pleasure to witness the great and unique event of Rāma's coronation. The sky was filled with the Devas who came to see the crowning of Rāma. The eight directions were filled with the people of the beautiful earth draped with the sea. The divine blare of conches and the thunder of drums filled the ears and the boundless charity of showers of gold filled the seven seas. The brightness and lustre of the ornaments worn by kings outshone the light from the lamps, while the dazzling glitter of their crowns surpassed sunshine. The jewels worn by women with pearly teeth and attractive smiles flashed in heaven, blinding the Devas and captivating the celestials.

Brahmins began chanting the coronation mantras from the four Védas after obtaining the necessary sacred materials. Sage Vasishtha who had great penance to his

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credit, came to the coronation hall crossing several ancient gateways. Keeping consecrated water from the rivers between Ganga and Kanyakumari and from the four seas ready, Vasishtha filled them in several pots. He also made preparations for the yāga fire. Experts in astrology declared that the auspicious time for the coronation ceremony had come. Sage Vasishtha asked Sumantira to bring Emperor Dasaratha. Accordingly, Sumantira who had great love for Dasaratha, left the place. Unable to find the king in his palace, Sumantira went to the palace of Kaikeyi and informed the maids of the purpose of his visit. When the maids conveyed the message to Kaikeyi, a Yama amongst womankind, she asked Sumantira to fetch Rāma. Kaikeyi's words filled Sumantira (who was unaware of her evil designs) with joy. After swiftly crossing several streets full of golden mansions, he entered Rāma's palace and saw him worshipping Lord Tirumāl. Sumantira told Rāma, "Kings, great sages and the people of the earth shower their affection on you in the same manner as they do on Dasaratha and are awaiting your coronation. Your step-mother Kaikeyi has asked me to bring you to her palace. Kindly proceed at once to wear the gem-studded golden crown." Completing his worship of Tirumāl, Rāma, accompanied by a vast concourse of kings, Devas singing divine music, others offering salutations and blessings and womenfolk gazing avidly at him, left in a beautiful chariot decorated with garlands.

Learning that Rāma was going to get adorned with the beautiful gem-set crown, women prompted by their love and affection for him, competed with each other in swarming both sides of the route he took. For them, Rāma was their sole life, and they saw this unique life proceeding in that incomparable chariot. Even before Rāma was to go to the forest giving up his crown and the sacred land in response to the shocking words of cruel Kaikeyi, he seemed to enter a huge forest full of thick bamboos (women's arms) and deadly véls (women's eyes)! Women who wanted to sprinkle scented powder, flowers and gold coins all along his route threw away instead, their beautiful girdles, bangles and even their *shyness*. Their soft breasts pierced by cupid's arrows were washed by their lustful tears. Some women held in sorrow that Rāma, of beautiful eyes, was not suited to rule the world as he did not have the compassion to relieve them of their suffering. Some wondered whether there were several persons with the face of Rāma because they found him everywhere with his red-eyed handsome face.

The sages, elderly men and youngsters of ancient Ayōdhya looked at the divine body of Rāma with boundless affection in their hearts. They said, "O Rāma, with you wearing the crown, the world will be relieved of afflictions. May you live forever,

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taking away even our life–spans. Let all the noble virtues, resulting from the performance of great penances controlling the five senses, reach you. May virtuous acts yield good benefits to you the wearer of a green tulasi garland." They wondered what great penance the lotus-flower and the rain-bearing clouds must have done to resemble the bright merciful eyes and the complexion of Rāma! A few observed, "What can we give to Dasaratha in return for having done rare penance and given us this illustrious Rāma? The mercy of Rāma, the greatest among men, is equal to the mercy shown by Lord Tirumāl to Gajendra the elephant." Still others went close to Rāma with tears flowing for no ostensible reason, and stood near him. Some observed, "Apart from the qualities of head and heart, does anyone have the character of Rāma? He cannot be compared even to the Devas unlike whom, Rāma has neither a beginning, nor an end. The sons of Sagara who dug up the sea in days of yore, Bhageeratha who brought Ganga to the earth, and Musukundan who vanquished the Asuras — all belonging to the Solar dynasty — should be proud of the fame of the valiant shoulders of Rāma."

Flawless ruby chains, sandalwood, elephants with vermilion on their foreheads, victorious horses, and bars of pure gold were brought and placed at the disposal of Rāma to be gifted to the poor. Those who watched Rāma pass by in the shining lustrous chariot had the experience of a cow watching her calf jumping and running towards her. "After the birth of Rāma, the begetting of sons by mighty kings has no meaning," said some, and stood gazing at him. To prevent magnificent Rāma (who with the sacred thread across his chest, appeared like a dark cloud with a streak of lightning), from going past their houses too fast, a few citizens tried to block the way with loads of gold and gems. Some of them said, *"Rāma was not brought up by his mother, but by Kaikeyi, his step-mother. To describe the joy she must be feeling about Rāma's being asked to rule the world would be difficult!"* The Different groups of people assembled there observed that if Rāma became the emperor he would wipe away all sins and insurmountable afflictions. He would ensure that this earth belonged not exclusively to him but to all, and the enemies of the Devas would be destroyed by him. They said how very fortunate were the kings who would be carrying out the commands of Rāma. While the people who had assembled there were talking, Rāma sped on in the gem-studded chariot driven by Sumantira. Crossing many streets full of mansions flying royal flags, Rāma reached the palace of Dasaratha whose fame was his ornament. But Rāma could not see Dasaratha who was usually seated on the throne, wearing his precious crown and flanked by adoring women waving chowries. Not finding him there, Rāma did not go to the golden hall where his coronation was

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to take place and where sages and kings had gathered to extol him. Instead, he went straight to the palace of his step-mother, Kaikeyi. The sages and kings who saw this observed that Rāma was doing the right thing in seeking the blessings of his father and in requesting only him to place the great crown on his head.

Kaikeyi saw Rāma coming in search of Dasaratha who had partially recovered. She felt that Dasaratha himself might not tell Rāma about the boons granted to her and therefore decided to tell him everything. Cruel Kaikeyi came like Yama and stood before Rāma who considered her his mother. Rāma when he saw her, approached her with the love with which a calf would rush at dusk towards its mother. He covered his coral-like red mouth with one hand and held his folded garment in place with the other. Casting his head down, he stood before her with humility. Kaikeyi had an iron heart and was cruel, though she did not bear the name of that merciless killer Yama. She told Rāma that there was something his father wanted to tell him. If Rāma thought it proper for her to convey it, she would do so. Rāma replied, "When my father commands, and you convey the same to me, I feel great. Is there anyone more fortunate than I? Can there be anything greater than this? You are my father as well as my mother! I am waiting to carry out your wish. Please command me." Kaikeyi told Rāma, "The Emperor has said that Bharata shall rule the entire world surrounded by the sea. You shall leave this land in the garb of an ascetic with matted hair, go to the dusty and humid forest, bathe in the sacred waters there and return to Ayōdhya after fourteen years."

How can persons like me describe the great beauty seen then on the divine face of Rāma whose virtuous qualities are beyond description? *Rāma's face, which resembled a red lotus prior to Kaikeyi's words, now became brighter and vanquished a blooming lotus. He had earlier agreed to bear the hardship of protecting the world steeped in darkness, afraid of transgressing the commands of the clear-headed Dasaratha. When Rāma heard the words of Kaikeyi, he felt relieved like a black bullock, yoked by its owner to a cart, released from its burden of carrying the load by the intervention of a merciful person.* Rāma told Kaikeyi, *"Even if what you said is not the command of my father, will I disobey your orders? If my brother Bharata gets the kingdom, will it not be the wealth obtained by this humble self? What else is better for me than this? I will carry out your command and go today itself to the forest. I take leave of you this very moment."* Having spoken these words, the mountain-shouldered Rāma prostrated himself at the feet of his step-mother, offered salutations in the direction of the feet of

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his father and proceeded to the palace of his mother, Kausalya, plunging Lakshmi the dweller of the golden lotus and Mother Earth in agony.

4. LEAVING THE CITY

Kausalya was happily expecting Rāma to return after his coronation. But Rāma came and stood before her unaccompanied by persons waving white chowries or the royal umbrella held over him. He walked alone, pulled by fate and followed by the sorrowful dharma. Kausalya wondered why Rāma did not wear the crown and why the hair on his head was not wet with holy water. Rāma with golden anklets, prostrated himself at the soft feet of Kausalya and received her blessings. She asked him why he was visiting her without his crown and whether there was any hurdle. Folding his hands, Rāma replied, "Your son, my younger brother Bharata of flawless character, will be wearing the great crown." Kausalya who loved all the four brothers equally, said, *"The only flaw in the proposal is that it is against the usual custom of crowning the eldest son alone. Otherwise, Bharata has more than three times the noble qualities that you possess." Kausalya added, "My dear son! It was dharma on your part not to have disobeyed the commands of the king. Give this land to your younger brother Bharata, co-operate with him and live for several yugas."* Rāma, of pure mind and a flawless heart, was very happy when he heard this and said, "My father has one more command to set me on the right path." When Kausalya wanted to know what it was, Rāma replied, "I have been asked by the king to go and live with the great sages in the forest for fourteen years."

Even before Rāma's scorching words reached Kausalya's ears, she was in great grief. She withered, became bewildered, and was in agony. She wailed and fell on the floor. In utter dismay, she cried, "Dear son, is it to deceive you that the king earlier told you that you should, with great attachment, protect this huge kingdom? Or was it a deadly poison to kill me? My life, which was hitherto fearless, is now full of dread." Affected severely by sorrow, she cracked her knuckles. With her tender hands, she kneaded the belly which had borne her son Rāma and swallowed her grief, emitting smoke-like sighs. She 'laughed' aloud at the 'mercy' shown by the king. She stood up and asked Rāma when he would proceed to the big forest? She already looked like a person suffering from the agony experienced when sweet life departs from the body. She asked Rāma what wrong he had done to the king who had all along felt great affection for him. She hid her face with her hands and wept bitterly. *She bemoaned like one who suddenly comes across gold only to lose it, after suffering from poverty due*

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to the sins of previous births! She suffered like a cow losing her calf. It was impossible to describe her pitiable condition. Holding his sorrowful mother in his arms, Rāma asked her, "O chaste mother, will you make our truthful king a liar?" Trying to console her, he told her a few appropriate, beautiful, truthful words in a convincing manner. "As you rightly said, Bharata, who is greater than I, deserves to receive the wealth of this kingdom. I shall not make my father a liar even through oversight. I will live in the forest and return only after the stipulated time. There cannot be a greater good fortune for me than this in my life. Even if the sky, earth, sea, fire and wind (the five elements) were to be destroyed, can I disobey my father? Should you suffer from sorrow just because of my father's commands?" Kausalya replied, "My son, if that is your decision, I will not, in deference to the king's command, ask you to desist from going to the forest. I am unable to carry this burden of life which still clings on to me. When you leave, take me along with you."

Rāma asked Kausalya, "Will it be proper for you to go with me to the forest instead of remaining by the side of the king and consoling him when he would be drowned in a sea of sorrow unable to bear my departure? Your decision will only mean that you have disregarded dharma. You may go to the forest *with the Emperor* who will be renouncing the kingdom and doing penance there after my younger brother Bharata becomes the king of this land. Why are you ignoring the duties you have to discharge? Have not the Devas, too, become great only after doing appropriate penance? How many years have I to spend in the forest? Only fourteen. They will pass away like fourteen days. In the past, was it not because I accepted the grace of Sage Viswāmitra and went to the forest that I learnt great skills and obtained many benefits? Even now, if I go to the forest and carry out the directions of the sages living there, only good will follow. You will see for yourself that I will serve these great sages, equip myself with knowledge which is hard to get, perform incomparable and impeccable feats, gain the love of the Devas and then return to this city. Long ago, in obedience to the instructions of their father, the sons of Sagara dug up the earth to create a sea. Though they lost their sweet lives, their sense of duty has made them immortal. Parasurāma, the son of sage Jamadagni obeyed his father and severed the very head of his mother. In these circumstances, how can I ever think of going against the commands of my father?" Taking to heart the words uttered by Rāma and realising that he was determined to leave the land, Kausalya thought, "Let Bharata rule the kingdom. I shall, however, approach the emperor and plead with him to prevent Rāma from going to the forest." As Kausalya went looking for Dasaratha, Rāma felt that only Sumitra could console Dasaratha, appease Kausalya and wipe out his own sorrow. So he left for Sumitra's palace.

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Kausalya, who went on foot to meet Dasaratha, reached Kaikeyi's palace. When she saw Dasaratha lying on the floor, she fell unconscious like one dead. Regaining her senses, she wailed, "O king, why are you separating me and my son? We have never been parted from each other so far. Is it proper for you to send Rāma to the forest? Why did you fail to think about us? *We are dependent on you who are like the wealth that brings credit to the strong, and gives strength to the weak. Is your action right? Have you been prompted by fate?* O emperor, is it your intention that the world which has been swayed by your brilliant, judicial sceptre should forthwith be destroyed by pralaya? Is what you did a merciful act? O benefactor of this huge world surrounded by the sea, you are like the dharma enunciated in the scriptures filled with treatises on virtue! You are the very embodiment of mercy! Why have you become still and silent without uttering a word?" Kausalya continued to lament and said, "The king is in great misery. His body appears to be motionless like a streak of lightning that has suddenly become still. He does not reveal what has happened to him. O Rāma, my son! I do not understand what exactly has happened here. Please come and see the condition of the king." The mournful cries of Kausalya were audible in the hall where the coronation was to take place. Even before the wailing was fully heard, the kings and sages became concerned. They kept repeating that such lamentations should not be heard on that auspicious day, and wanted to know what the matter was.

Sage Vasishtha hurried to the place where Dasaratha lay. Surveying the scene and looking at Dasaratha's condition, he dreaded to think of the outcome. He felt, "Dasaratha is not dead but he is not going to live. He is now unconscious! While the stone-hearted Kaikeyi has cast off grief, Kausalya is grief-stricken. This difference in the thinking of the minds of two persons belonging to one and the same noble family is baffling." Realising that the sorrowful Kausalya would not reveal the cause of her grief, Vasishtha asked Kaikeyi who stood bowing before him, "Dear mother, what is the reason for the king's condition?" Then, Kaikeyi herself explained to Vasishtha all that had happened. Even before she could finish narrating the events, Vasishtha lifted Dasaratha from the floor and told him, "O learned king, please do not worry. Kaikeyi will give the kingdom to your beloved Rāma. Desist from what you propose to do and relieve yourself of your agony." Vasishta sprinkled cool fragrant water over Dasaratha's face, fanned him gently, and spoke soothing words to him. Dasaratha appeared to be slowly coming out of the effects of Kaikeyi's harsh words which were like the Hālāhala poison. The sage found Dasaratha regaining consciousness and constantly muttering the name of his beloved son, Rāma. On seeing Dasaratha reviving, Vasishtha said, "O lord, cast away your

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worries. Rāma, the lord of mankind, will rule the kingdom. Flawless Kaikeyi herself will present the kingdom to him. Would we agree to Rāma's leaving for the forest without wearing the crown?" Dasaratha replied, "O great sage, sinner as I am, I never realised that this is what would happen. Before I die, please adorn Rāma with the decorated crown by preventing Kaikeyi from thinking of sending him to the forest; and thereby save my words from attaining blemish." Looking at the face of the cruel Kaikeyi who attracted universal censure, Vasishtha pleaded, "O Lakshmi-like damsel, please obtain immortal glory by granting the kingdom to your son Rāma and by giving sweet life to others, including your noble husband who has come in the footsteps of Manu." Even before Vasishtha (the conqueror of destinies both good and evil) could complete his words, Kaikeyi sobbed bitterly and said, "If the emperor is to go back on his assurances, I do not want to live in this great world. I will not hesitate to die right now to prevent my words from becoming false."

Vasishtha told Kaikeyi, "You know well that if you do not relent, your husband will die. The people of the world will not approve of your action The stain will stay with you and grow greater. There is sin inherent in your action and it is not proper for you to reject good advice. What else can I tell you?" Not content with these words, Vasishtha spoke sternly, "You do not appear to visualise the sorrow that will ensue if life leaves the body of your husband. You talk to me as if you are fire or poison that enters a wound. Are you a woman, fire, or a fiend? O cruel woman, what have you to do with this world hereafter? The blemish that would taint you will be perennial. Even before Dasaratha asked his son to leave for the forest, you commanded him to go, and Rāma will never hesitate to reach the dense forest with fierce pathways. You seem to be a devastating fire capable of destroying your own fame along with the life of your husband. Can anyone be as cruel as you? What more are you going to do?" Hearing with anguish the words of faultless Vasishtha, Dasaratha addressed the poison-tongued Kaikeyi, "Wicked woman, have you dispatched my beloved son, Rāma, to the fierce forest? And has he gone? O sinner, I have seen through your mind. *Out of lust, I have been consuming poison from your fruit-like lips all these days. In return, you have now consumed my very life. With Agni as witness, I thought I had taken you as my wife. Instead, I chose for myself a Yama. You despicable sinner! Don't you know that my eyes exist only to see Rāma? By plotting to send him to the wild forest, you have shamelessly dismembered my body.* I know that any amount of pleading is of no use with you, as you are not ashamed of any censure whatsoever. The sacred māngalyam

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will no longer be around your neck because I shall die. It will only become the amulet around Bharata's wrist."

After Dasaratha found that whatever he said would not make Kaikeyi relent even a bit, he looked at Sage Vasishtha and said, *"I am telling you today that Kaikeyi is no longer my wife. I have cast her away. I will also not consider Bharata who is to become the king soon, my son. He will not be entitled to perform my last rites."* Turning to Kausalya, the very embodiment of virtue, Dasaratha asked her whether Rāma (who was prevented from saying anything after seeing him) had not seen even her. Looking at the state of Kausalya who had come to him for comfort, Dasaratha felt sad. Kausalya realised that all that had happened was the outcome of Kaikeyi's action. "My husband gave boons to Kaikeyi and is now in agony unable to bear the consequences," she thought. She consoled Dasaratha that Rāma would return. At the same time, she also felt sad thinking of the blame that would fall on Dasaratha if he forsook truth. She told him, "O mighty king, whatever may be the compelling circumstances, if you transgress truth, the unique, unassailable respect, regard and honour which you now enjoy will be damaged. If your love for Rāma prevents you from carrying out your promise, will the people of the world approve of your action?" Kausalya knew that Rāma would not desist from going to the forest, and because of that her husband would not survive. She was in agony, thinking of it over and over. She was also concerned that blame would surround her husband's name if she pleaded with him to prevent Rāma from going to the forest. Alas! What great mental agony Kausalya underwent!

Realising from the words of Kausalya that Rāma would go to the forest, Dasaratha became weak with greater agony, and spoke aloud addressing Rāma, "O noble son, come and help this accursed man. Please appear before me. My eyes have become tears, my life is flowing out and I am on the verge of death. The holy water brought by the sages from sacred rivers for bathing you before your coronation may now be used by you for my last rites. Thereafter, you may go to the forest." Dasaratha went on prattling, "O mighty man who conquered sturdy Parasurāma, I asked you to wear my crown but immediately thereafter, I had to command you to adopt matted hair. O dark-complexioned Rāma with exquisite eyes and hands! You are the embodiment of patience. You broke the bow of Lord Siva. What a pity that I have none but you to help me. Even you are leaving me in disgust in my old age. I do not wish to live any longer. You are like gold but more precious than gold. You excel the glory of fame. You hold a strong bow more powerful than even lightning. You are the very embodiment of truth. I am not

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foolish to allow you to go to the forest till I leave. Even before you enter the forest, I will reach heaven. I am not as strong–willed as you are. Unlike you, I possess a heart that would melt and a life that would leave the body because of my abundant love for you. Having seen you enter Ayōdhya rightfully holding the hand of Seeta, I cannot with the same eyes see you depart from the city. You shine as my fame. It may be possible for the people of the world and the Devas to live after being separated from you but not for me because I am your father. I know how precious you are. In what manner can I explain my present predicament? I will not live at all. You have attained fame by gifting away the entire world surrounded by the deep sea, the whole kingdom and the unlimited wealth contained therein to that thief (Kaikeyi), but your charity is killing me. O Rāma, in all the earthly world, in the heaven above and the infernal region below,there is no one as great as you are. O golden Rāma, when you were challenged by Parasurāma, you had the courage to face him unrelentingly. Is there anyone who can stop you now? I will be considered cruel if even after learning that you are leaving for the forest, I remain here without reaching heaven. Dear son, it is ridiculous to think that I will live in this land, gazing at Kaikeyi while you are in the forest. If seeta (embraced by your strong chest as a result of her penance) and Nilamagal (Goddess Earth) are unable to attain you, they will not live. Cursed as I am, if I am separated from you, I will certainly die. Instead, if I continue to live even after being separated from you, will I not be like that cruel Kaikeyi? I am entitled to see you happily occupying the golden throne under a regal umbrella with a proud chest and ornaments including the crown. I would rather die than see you wear the bark of a tree and the skin of a deer."

Dasaratha went on talking and wailing incoherently and reached a stage of suffering when it was feared he would die that very day. Realising this, Vasishtha asked him not to be concerned and said that he would at once stop Rāma from leaving the land. Dasaratha wondered if what Vasishtha said was possible. The hope that Rāma might not go to the forest if he was advised by the sage, partly delayed Dasaratha's end. After some time, he swooned. Fearing that the king had lost his consciousness as well as his life, Kausalya started wailing, "My son Rāma has already deserted me. O king of kings! My dear partner in life! Is it dharma on your part that you, too, should desert me? O incarnation of truth, if you are in such grief without caring for your life, the entire world will be plunged in agony. It is still possible that Rāma will return with Sage Vasishtha. Therefore, please do not grieve." Kausalya who tried to console Dasaratha, pleaded with him in several ways and rubbed his feet and face with her red hands. Dasaratha did not fully regain consciousness and was in a

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dazed state. He slowly asked Kausalya, "Will my Rāma, the possessor of the mighty bow, ever return? After listening to Kooni's words, deceitful Kaikeyi decided to destroy my life through the boons she had acquired. Otherwise, in addition to obtaining the kingdom for her son, would she have asked our eldest son, Rāma, to go to the forest? He will not desist from going to the forest. My life will definitely leave my body. *There is a curse which was once inflicted on me by a great sage.* Long ago, fond of hunting, I used to go in search of elephants and lions in dense forests. On one such occasion, holding my arrow and bow ready to shoot, I was hiding on the banks of a river which elephants used to frequent. In that forest, a great sage called Salabōjana was performing penance assisted by his wife. Both were totally blind, but they were ably supported by their only son, Surōcana. Suddenly I heard a sound. I did not know that Surōcana had come to the river to fetch water for his parents. I thought it was an elephant. I shot an arrow which pierced Surōcana and brought him down in great distress. I had not actually seen any elephant with my eyes. I only shot the arrow in the direction of a sound similar to that of a mighty elephant sucking water through its trunk from the river. On hearing the wailing of the sage's son, I realised that it was not an elephant but a human being whom I had shot. I became frightened and felt miserable at the calamity caused by me, and went to the site. I saw that the water jug had slipped from the hands of the sage's son, and he had rolled down onto the ground with his body pierced by an arrow. I, too, became lifeless. I lost my senses.

"My bow became useless and I fell near Surōcana. In great agony I asked him who he was. The boy began to tell me about himself. He said, 'I came to bring water for my blind parents and I have met with this accident here. O king possessing mountain-like shoulders, you mistook me for an elephant and you shot an arrow at me. Please think that all this happened as a result of fate and discard your grief. I had come to fetch water to quench my father's thirst. Kindly carry this water-jug to him. Inform him of my unexpected death and convey my respects to him on the eve of my reaching heaven!' Because of his virtues, Surōcana attained heaven. Carrying the son's body and the water-jug, I went to the great sage and his wife. Presuming that his son had come back, the sage said, 'We thought some harm had befallen you, my son, because of the delay in your return. Come and embrace us.' I told the sage, 'It is I, the king of Ayōdhya. Your beloved and faithful son was filling water in his jug from the river near by. I mistook the sound for that of an elephant sucking water. I shot an arrow without actually seeing your son. No sooner did I hear a human wail than I realised that it was a man that I had shot and not an elephant. I ran to your son who told me all about himself. He conveyed his respects to you before losing his life and

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reaching heaven. Please do not be angry with me for having slain your son whom I did not actually see. I shot my arrow only on hearing the gurgle of the water entering the jug. I am innocent. I beg your pardon for my carelessness!' Then I fell at the sage's feet, my crown touching them.

"On hearing my words, the boy's parents fell on the ground. They lamented that they had lost their eyes only that day. They wailed that they were drowned in a sea of sorrow and said, because of the loss of their son, their hearts were broken, and that they could not allow him to enjoy all by himself the fruits of heaven and that they would join him at once. I again fell at their feet and requested them to treat me as their son. I told them, 'I will carry out all your commands sincerely. Please do not be depressed. Cast away your sorrow.' On hearing this, the sage told me, 'We will be laughed at by the world if we still eat and live unmindful of having lost our precious son who was our eyes. We will go to heaven at once. You, too, one day will reach heaven like us, unable to bear separation from your son. O possessor of an imperishable royal white umbrella, you have owned your folly, surrendered at my feet and sought my protection. Therefore I do not wish to inflict a severe curse on you. You will be separated from your son, who will with ability carry out all your wishes without even the need of any prompting from you. After mourning like us, you will die.' Thereafter, the parents of the boy passed away and reached heaven. *When they cursed me, I was not in the least upset. I reached the city happily with the thought that I would be blessed with a son who would be lisping sweet words.* Now I realise that the curse of that sage will not go in vain. Rāma will go to the forest. My life will desert me. This is certain to happen."

Sage Vasishtha reached the coronation hall where kings had gathered in large numbers with the thunder of royal drums to witness the crowning of Rāma. On seeing the face of the sage, the kings asked him if there was any impediment to the coronation celebrations and wanted to know the cause of the sound of wailing which arose from prolonged agony. Vasishtha replied, "Kaikeyi has asked for two boons and Dasaratha known for his adherence to dharma has granted them. She made him agree to send Rāma to the forest. This is what has happened. Because of the other boon Dasaratha granted, Bharata the son of Kaikeyi has acquired the right to rule this world. The lofty-shouldered Rāma, the husband of Seeta, has to leave for the forest and stay there."

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Women, kings, sages and others who loved Rāma, fell down like Dasaratha even before the words of the truthful Vasishtha entered their ears. They rolled on the floor in agony as if fire was thrust into a gaping wound! Tears flowed from their eyes like rivers and reached the sea. Their wails rose up to the sky. Women threw away their jewels and sacred māngalyams out of disgust. Their plaited hair came loose. Their eyes which were like Yama to their husbands became red! Their feet trembled and they fell on the floor like creepers hit by the northern wind. Kings who loved Rāma remarked that Dasaratha had no mercy at all. Swearing that they would hereafter give up dharma, they fell down like big trees uprooted by a storm. On hearing that the munificent Rāma would leave for the forest, the parrots and the minahs wept bitterly and the domestic cats wailed. When even babes wept, how can one describe the agony of the elders? Sweetly lisping women (with jasmine-bud-like teeth peeping out of their red mouths and teardrops falling from their eyes) sobbed bitterly. The calves and cows of Ayōdhya wept like Dasaratha, unable to bear separation from Rāma. Fresh flowers, birds, inhabitants of water, honey-shedding groves, mighty elephants and even war horses wept. Except for Kaikeyi who sought the departure of Rāma to the forest, and the cruel Kooni, there was none who did not weep at the thought of Rāma's departure. It was as if everybody had melted into water! Countless were the persons who had swooned without regaining consciousness. In all the streets where chariots rolled raising dust, tears shed by people flowed like rivers. *The only ones that could be faulted that day, were the hearts of people which did not break into pieces and join the river of tears!*

The people of Ayōdhya were making different comments among themselves. Some of them observed that it was the sin committed by the earth. Some others said that the sin of Lakshmi was greater than the sin of the earth. Yet others commented that fate had wounded their hearts. A few others said that the sin of the people of the earth was bigger in dimension than even the sea. Many were the comments made by groups of people in Ayōdhya. They said severally, that Bharata would not reign; that their fate was so cruel that Rāma would not return to the city; that the victorious coronation celebration turned out to be a disaster; that there were none more stone-hearted than themselves because they remained alive even after learning of Rāma's departure; that the great Dasaratha had lost his senses owing to his excessive love for Kaikeyi; that they also would follow Rāma to the wild forest or else they would immolate themselves. Many of them touched the ground with their hands and soaked it with their tears. They sighed heavily, feeling sorry that precious Kausalya would no longer survive. They wondered whether the younger brother, Lakshmana, could bear separation from Rāma! Like ghee poured into fire,

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the people of Ayōdhya were infuriated by their grief. Even the dancing-girls with sweet mouths shedding nectar, felt sad that heartless Kaikeyi, to secure the kingdom for her son, had committed this despicable act of sending Rāma to the forest. The people of Ayōdhya wondered whether Emperor Dasaratha, without any concern for his subjects and with the aim of pursuing his own ascetic path before leaving the world, could have done this. Or else, was it done to kill the people of the world and get rid of them? The citizens of Ayōdhya exclaimed, "Wonderful indeed was his act of giving these boons to Kaikeyi!" Many in Ayōdhya said, "As Dasaratha's eldest son, Rāma possessed the right to rule the whole world. Still, he gave away his inherited land to Kaikeyi. We will follow him and reach the forest. When we begin to inhabit the forest, it will be transformed in a few days from a forest infested with snake-pits into a fine land. *The behaviour of Dasaratha is puzzling. Having given this land first to his eldest son, Rāma, Dasaratha now gives the same land to Bharata against all canons of justice. By this act, will not truth be sacrificed?* Kaikeyi deceitfully got her son, Bharata, to inherit the land from Rāma. If Seeta, too, leaves this land and goes to the forest along with Rāma, will the goddess of wealth ever accept Bharata and stay here?" The women of Ayōdhya, shivering and oscillating like neglected lamps shaken by wild winds, missed Rāma's beautiful, big, lotus eyes, and lamented over their fate.

While the citizens of Ayōdhya were expressing their grief, Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rāma, also heard that his cruel step-mother Kaikeyi had usurped the kingdom from Rāma for the sake of her son, Bharata, and that Rāma had been banished to the forest. Blazing up like the devastating pralaya fire, Lakshmana rose, his eyes emitting fire. His eyebrows arched with fury. His anger shook even the sun in the sky. Perspiring heavily, with fiery breath, furious Lakshmana was like his original form, Ādisesha. *In great anger, Lakshmana said that Kaikeyi had desired to offer the delicious meat intended for a lion's cub to a dog's pup!* Laughing loudly, Lakshmana exclaimed, "Great indeed is this woman's cleverness," and clapped his red hands. The sword tucked in his hip was visible. The bow was ready in his hands. Arrows were stored in the quiver on his back. A shield made of red gold covered his chest. The roar of his lustrous hero's anklets put to shame the roar of the sea. The twang of his bow, was thrice as loud as the thunder heard during pralaya. The combined sound was so loud that the people of the three worlds (excluding him and his elder brother, Rāma) thought the five elements (including the sky and the earth) had crashed down and stood aloof in utter fright. Lakshmana then threw a loud

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challenge, "Let those who oppose the coronation of Rāma fight with me. I will destroy them and throw their bodies all over the world reducing the load of Mother Earth. I will adorn my brother, Rāma, with the victorious crown. Let me see who has the strength to stop me. I will not give way to the evil designs of Kaikeyi even if the humans, Devas, Vidyādharas, Nāgas, or for that matter the Trinity of Gods join hands and oppose me." Exhibiting the harshness of the midday sun, Lakshmana moved around in the centre of the city of Ayōdhya like the unique Mandara mountain which once served as a staff for churning the ocean of milk!

Rāma who was unsuccessfully trying to assuage Sumitra's grief, suddenly heard the thunderous twang of Lakshmana's bow threatening to shatter the universe into smithereens. Heavy winds and wildfire broke out. As if to put out the pralaya fire, Rāma came out to Lakshmana like a cloud of collyrium with his golden jewels shining like a rainbow. Without deviating from his stand, Rāma spoke words which were like drops of rain to Lakshmana. Seeing Lakshmana (with a golden body and hands that could discharge a rain of arrows) shouting at the top of his voice in fury, Rāma asked him why he held his bow in readiness for a fight though he had never shown anger so far. Lakshmana replied, "I have decided to crown you in the presence of Kaikeyi who has a black heart and who after destroying truth is going to deprive you of your right. Like fire burning cotton, I will burn all those, including the Devas, who try to obstruct me. As long as I have this mighty bow in my hand, even the celestials will not dare to prevent me from accomplishing my mission. If they try to interfere, I will destroy them with my arrows. I will place the fourteen worlds in front of you and make you the sovereign of all the kings therein." Rāma asked Lakshmana, "Hasn't your mind always trodden the path of justice? When anger, responsible for the destruction of the indestructible dharma, has never found a place in you, how could you lose your temper?" Lakshmana laughed, showing his pearly teeth and said, "If this slave of yours does not exhibit anger now, when will he do so? Our father initially gave the kingdom to you but after you accepted it you lost it due to to your enemies! Dasaratha not only deprived you of the kingdom but unjustly asked you to go to the forest. In my very presence, he gave you this land and took it back. Will I ever bear this body with its five troublesome senses and continue to live, after you are sent to the forest by heartless Kaikeyi?" Rāma replied, "O holder of a fierce and lustrous spear! No doubt, the emperor had asked me earlier to wear the crown. *It was my fault that I accepted the offer without realising that such acceptance of sovereignty would have its repercussions. Beloved brother! It is not the fault of the river if it dries up for lack*

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of water. Similarly my present predicament is not due to the fault of our father, nor of our step-mother, Kaikeyi, who nurtured us with great love and care, nor of Bharata. Dear brother, all this has happened only because of destiny. Why are you angry over this?" These words of Rāma did not pacify Lakshmana. He replied, "I am unable to control my fury which is as fierce as the fire emanating from a forge fanned by bellows. You will now see the unique might of my bow which will upset even that destiny ordained by the Trinity of Gods and teach a lesson to Kaikeyi who has done you this harm."

Lakshmana's outburst was the result of all the events that had transpired that day. Rāma, however, said, *"How can you talk so recklessly with the tongue with which you recite the sacred scriptures? Your utterances are not that of a righteous person. It is improper to be furious especially when our parents are responsible for the happenings not desired by you."* After listening to him, Lakshmana (who appeared like Rudra) extolled Rāma for his sacrifice and said, "For me, you are my noble father and an exceptional leader. You are also the mother who bore me in her womb! I have none else. You will, however, witness what I am going to do now." Rāma stopped the furious Lakshmana with his hands and told him, "Kaikeyi has the right over this land, having secured the boons from Dasaratha. Bharata will inherit the kingdom. *My only inheritance shall be my penance. What is greater than this for me? Tell me, when will you get rid of your anger? Is it after defeating our helpful, virtuous, brother Bharata (who is not enamoured of this world) or after defeating our noble father (extolled by the great) or after defeating our mother Kaikeyi who gave birth to us?"*

Lakshmana replied,"So far I have always carried only words of praise even from my enemies but now I carry two useless heavy stones, my tall shoulders. I also needlessly hold the quiver and a sturdy bow. What is the use of my anger?" *Rāma who had crossed the ocean of the southern language Tamil, and had seen the boundaries of the culture of the northern language Sanskrit, replied,* "It will not be proper on my part to rule this land against the word of the father who brought me up with sweet and loving words. Now, if you are to act against my word, just think of the great humiliation you will suffer." Commanded by Rāma (who was like the four Védas), Lakshmana gave up his anger and stopped arguing. Like the waves which are contained within the shores of the sea, Lakshmana was contained. Like Lord Tirumāl embracing Lord Siva (part of Tirumāl), Rāma embraced Lakshmana. Accompanied by him, Rāma entered the mansion of Sumitra whose words were ever noble.

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Sumitra saw Rāma and Lakshmana who were like her two eyes, getting ready to go to the Dandaka forest. Unable to sight the shores of her profound sea of grief, Sumitra fell onto the floor with a wounded heart. Rāma ran, made his obeisance, held her and pacified her. He told her, "I cannot make the emperor a liar. I shall therefore go, have a glimpse of the huge, dark, clouded forest and return. Wherever I enter — whether it is the forest, the sea, or the thunderous heaven — for me it will be like entering majestic Ayōdhya. Who is there who has the strength to harm me? Please relieve yourself of this sorrow which has penetrated your body, life and senses." While Rāma and Lakshmana were consoling Sumitra, Kaikeyi's maids came there with the bark clothing sent by her. The maids with heavy hearts shed copious tears on seeing the cloud-like Rāma and said, "Even after watching the boundless grief and agony of others, Kaikeyi has not changed her mind and this garb made from the bark of a tree has now arrived." Lakshmana, the brother of the charitable Rāma, told the maids, "Here stands the great Rāma born to obey unhesitatingly the commands of Kaikeyi who makes him lose the prosperous kingdom and wear the raiment sent by her. Born to see this sight, I stand here holding a bow in my hand, but unable to use it. Please produce the bark clothing." Lakshmana respectfully accepted it from the maids, prostrated himself at the golden feet of his mother, Sumitra, and said, "Dear mother! Get rid of your agony and bid me to accompany my brother to the forest." *Her long eyes overflowing with tears, Sumitra replied, "For you, the forest to which Rāma is to go, will not be unsuitable. For you, that forest shall be the city of Ayōdhya. Beloved Rāma will be like our King Dasaratha, and Seeta wearing flowers will be like the mother who has not given up her life even after knowing that Rāma has given up this land to Bharata. Bear this in mind and leave for the forest along with Rāma. Even a moment's delay here, will be a crime. My dear son, follow Rāma, not like a brother but like a dedicated slave. If Rāma returns to Ayōdhya, come back with him. If, however, Rāma does not return, die before him!"*

Rāma and Lakshmana bowed to Sumitra, and took leave of her. She lamented like a cow parting with her calves. These two unique brothers, Rāma and Lakshmana, removed their princely attire and wore the bark clothing. Looking at Lakshmana, Rāma said, "Please listen to my good advice. Our mothers and Emperor Dasaratha are not in a normal state of mind. They are drowned in utter misery. They also suffer from the agony of separation from me. Let their misery not be aggravated. Stay here and assist them. For my sake, please do this." Lakshmana who had great love for Rāma was terribly upset. His strong shoulders shook. He asked Rāma, "What wrong have I,

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your slave, done to you? O holder of a stringed-bow, only if there is water in the ponds, will there be fish and black lily plants. *Only if the world is in existence, will there be lives. Please tell me whose presence is needed for Seeta and me to live?* Paying heed to the words of a woman, the emperor made Mother Earth tremble with grief by directing you to go to the forest; and because I am the son of that protector of truth, Dasaratha, who still clings to his life, you speak thus. It is harsher than asking me to give up my anger! O holder of a victorious spear! Are you, duty-bound, to go to the forest (leaving behind the kingdom which is rightfully yours) deserting me?" Rāma did not wish to speak further. *With copious tears falling from his lotus eyes, he stood looking at Lakshmana for a long time.*

Flawless Vasishtha left the hall where the kings had assembled and came to the place where Rāma and Lakshmana stood. The virtuous brothers bowed to Vasishtha who was immersed in a sea of sorrow. Seeing their faces, the knowledgeable sage understood their minds. He also saw the splendour of their garb. There was nothing for him to say. Immersed in great grief, he was not his own self. On the auspicious day of the coronation, dreadful fate drove Rāma to wear bark clothing instead of the crown. If ill-fate were to dog a person, no power could overcome it, not even Brahma Himself! Vasishtha declared, "This event of Rāma leaving for the forest is neither because of cruel Kaikeyi nor because Rāma deserves it. How it has happened and who is responsible will all be known only in course of time." Turning to Rāma, Vasishtha told him, "The moment you leave the kingdom and go to the mountainous forest, Dasaratha will die." Rāma who had emerged from the bed of Ādisesha replied, "*While it is my duty to respectfully accept the commands of the emperor, it is your duty to relieve him of his sorrow. It is also just and fair.*" Vasishtha said, "It is true that without realising the consequences, the king has granted boons to Kaikeyi that would cause harm like enemies' arrows. But he never directed you to leave for the boundless forest." Rāma (born to stabilise dharma) asked Vasishtha, "How can you stop me when you were a witness to my father granting the boons to my mother, she directing me to abide by them, and I agreeing to obey?" Sage Vasishtha could not say anything further. Tears flowed from his eyes. Bowing to Vasishtha, the mountain-shouldered Rāma took leave of him, and left.

Let us describe, to the extent we can, the feelings of the people who saw Rāma (with his happy, lotus-like, flawless face), wearing the ascetic's garb, followed by Lakshmana. The women of Ayōdhya, resembling the celestials, struck their eyes with

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their hands. Some others who had great love for Rāma, reached heaven even before Dasaratha! Some women fell down with profound grief, some wept bitterly and left the place, some drowned themselves in their tears, while some others quivered in sorrow as though their plaited hair had caught fire. Some of the women capable of speaking sweet words appeared as if they had lost their wealth and were in such agony that they did not even shed tears. Some women felt that their lives would be extinguished at any time and some women found their lives repeatedly leaving and returning to their bodies. Tears from the eyes of some dried up; instead, blood flowed as if from a wound!

Unable to witness the sight of Rāma and Lakshmana walking in their bark clothing, countless warriors (resembling elephants) severed their heads with big swords and held them in one of their hands and fell down. Many others dug out their flowery eyes with their swords and threw them away. The jewels worn by women and the gems embedded in them were scattered everywhere. Girdles were found cut away and thrown on the ground like used garlands. Some women lost their smiling bright faces allowing the moon to vanquish them! Women who had none other than Rāma (their very life) for a son, rolled on the ground and lamented like young peacocks, koels and swans. The words of these women, which used to be sweeter than nectar, more pleasant than the flute and the yāzh, lost their melody because of their persistent loud wailing. Women who treated Rāma as their only son, wailed aloud, "The wild forest seems to have become the proper place for Rāma to enter!" Their red mouths weeping for Rāma looked like a field of red lilies blooming during the day. The rivers of tears they shed rolled down their mountainous breasts. The sixty thousand wives of Dasaratha, their relatives and friends, those who were far and near and the best women of the land felt as if they had been pushed into fire. They filled the palace gateways, sobbing aloud and following Rāma on all sides like a tidal sea. Not knowing what to tell them, nor aware of how to prevent them from following him, Rāma walked towards his mansion.

Rāma, who in a big chariot studded with precious gems had gone in a procession, to wear the crown, was now walking back on the beautiful highway, in an ascetic's garb. "It appears that life, which has not snapped even after witnessing the injustice done to the handsome, collyrium-complexioned Rāma, is stronger than the heart," said a few who saw Rāma and Lakshmana, observing that all pleasant things like food, dress and a place of abode now turned out to be worse than even poison. The citizens of Ayōdhya lamented and said several things. Some said, "Have we patiently

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waited all this while in the street only to see Rāma leaving for the forest instead of returning after his coronation? In this land which has allowed a woman to do a cruel thing like this, it is disgraceful to be born with eyes!" Some others said, "Born as the eldest son and having acquired the might to own the entire world, is it fair that Rāma should relinquish the kingdom and voluntarily go to live in the tiger-infested forest? Strange is our love for him if we only weep and continue to live even after seeing him leave." Addressing the kings who had become weak and actionless, a few persons remarked, "By failing to ask Dasaratha not to discard dharma, you have all become like Kaikeyi who sent Rāma (the vanquisher of Parasurāma who killed your race) to the forest." Some others said, *"Lakshmana (the son of that mother of twins) is accompanying Rāma with profound sorrow. Is he the only relative of Rāma in this city?"* Some of them threatened that they would chop the hearts which were harder than big stones, with an axe. Their copious tears fell on the ground forming a mire, making them slip and fall on the road. Some women threw away their golden jewels which shone like lightning and stars. They removed their silken dress and wore cotton clothes. Some of the people assembled in the highway remarked, "Even if a person is the father of many sons and loses just one son with a deformity in one of the five sense organs, he would give his very life for the sake of that son. The mind of the emperor can only be of steel when he sticks to his harsh words and allows his son to go to the forest."

Some women with slim waists and big breasts, wailing bitterly raised their folded red hands over their heads in reverence to Rāma and walked on either side of the highway like flowering creepers. Damsels who stood on the terraces of tall mansions embraced by the moon, shed tears and were in agony like sorrowful peacocks on mountain-tops. Women, standing near the countless windows of the palaces emitting cloud-like smoke from aquila, shed tears in great agony and wept like parrots in their cages. Women staying upstairs in lofty halls, shed profuse tears which flowed from the stairs, making the halls look like big eyes full of tears. In great distress, many women lost their senses and forgot their children, while the children could not find their mothers. Distinguished women with sweet voices went into the streets deserting their mansions which lost their glamour like the lotus deserted by the goddess of wealth (Lakshmi). Women wearing ear-rings and possessing beautiful faces assembled on one side of the pathway, untied their hair, spread it out like black clouds, and allowed their jewels to fall scattered on the ground. The agony of these women could be compared to a herd of deer lying wounded. *The whole of Ayōdhya*

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was steeped in sorrow. The flags on the huge mountain-like palaces ceased to fly and became immobile, the royal drums became silent while different types of musical instruments remained quiet with none to play them. The dust in the streets near the walls settled down because of the rain of tears flowing on the ground. Kitchens lost their smoke, lofty halls lost the smoke from aquila, cups intended to feed the parrots lost their milk and children lying in gem-studded cradles became depressed without the womenfolk. The faces of people lost their glow as if they were dead; the clouds lost their moisture; sacred temples discarded their usual worship, bees discarded the pleasure of sucking nectar from flowers, while rutting elephants discarded their rutting joy. The quality of giving shade got separated from the umbrella, flowers got separated from the hair of women with long eyes, heroes' anklets got separated from their ankles, Manmatha's arrows lost their fire, and loving nightingales got separated from each other. Horses were bereft of the jingling bells tied around their necks; drums were bereft of their thunder; streets were bereft of the rumble of rolling chariots and appeared like rivers without the sound of flowing water.

In the regal pathways there was no sound forthcoming from the drums; the usual music coming from the yāzh was absent; festivals meant for the gods did not produce any sound; in fact there was no sound anywhere in Ayōdhya except for the wailing of the people! In the middle of the beautiful palaces where the sound of anklets was always heard, nothing was heard now; jewelled girdles worn around the waists also made no sound; birds did not give out any sound in the water sources; groves remained silent; flower-loving bees did not hum; and even elephants were silent! Fields forgot to receive water and became dry; the hands of mothers forgot to fondle their babes; the burning sacrificial fire forgot to have ghee poured into it; all virtuous people and scholars forgot their true knowledge; and even the Vēdas forgot their customary practice of getting recited! Women who used to dance in groups wept; those who used to sing the seven notes wept; lovers who tore away their garlands during minor quarrels, also wept; and even women who were with their beloved husbands wept! Elephants did not stretch their trunks towards water for drinking; horses did not pick mouthfuls of grass for eating; birds did not collect food for their fledgelings; and cows did not allow their calves to suck milk! All the animals melted in sorrow. The taut breasts of women became poor due to the absence of sandalwood paste. Like the hair of men, the tresses of women, too, became poor from a dearth of fragrant flowers. Big elephants abhorred

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wearing decorated face plates; rows of beautiful palaces abhorred an ornamental decor; and male doves living in the golden walls abhorred dalliance with their female counterparts! Even the sages (of Ayōdhya) who treated good and bad with equanimity were drowned in unending grief. All in the city sighed heavily and writhed in agony. As a result of their excessive grief and the destabilisation of their five senses, the whole big city of Ayōdhya became exactly like Emperor Dasaratha who was about to die.

While the city of Ayōdhya was sunk in sorrow, innumerable persons who had assembled there followed Rāma in great anguish. *Rāma, the very life of all living creatures, reached the abode of Seeta who sported glittering jewels on her chest.* Mothers, brahmins, kings and others, with their bodies steeped in dust and dirt, came weeping on either side of bark-clad Rāma. Looking like a painted doll, Seeta on seeing them stood up startled. The lamenting women immediately embraced her and bathed her with tears. Without knowing the reason for their behaviour, Seeta looked at Rāma with a heavy heart, and tears began to flow from her eyes, too. She trembled and asked Rāma, "O wearer of a hero's anklets of gold, what is the reason for this sorrow? Has any harm befallen the renowned emperor?" Rāma replied, "My incomparable brother, Bharata, will rule this land in obedience to the directions of my great father and mother (Kaikeyi). I will start today for the cloudy mountainous forest and come back. Do not grieve." *After hearing Rāma, Seeta was not upset that her husband had lost his kingdom and that he had to go to the forest commanded by his father; but Rama's burning cruel words that she should stay at Ayōdhya without any concern, while he went to the forest, scorched her ears and made her sad.*

To protect the land, because virtue was waning, Lord Tirumāl had taken birth as Rāma in Ayōdhya, followed by Goddess Lakshmi in the guise of Seeta. Would such a divine Lakshmi tolerate Rāma telling her that he would go to the forest leaving her at Ayōdhya? For Seeta, the thought of separation from Rāma made her feel as though she was losing her life. She asked him, "It is sacred indeed to do the bidding of your father and mother but what justification is there in your asking me to stay back in Ayōdhya?" Rāma replied, "Your tender feet, dipped in a lotion of red flowers, are not strong enough to withstand the hazardous trek over the ferocious mountainous terrain which is as cruel as the Rākshasās and hot enough to melt lac. Stones will pierce your feet." Seeta did not relent. She said, "Without any mercy or attachment you want to go, deserting me. *Even the pralaya sun or fire cannot harm me to the extent the fury of*

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the heat of separation from you would. Will the big forest to which you are going burn me more than the agony of separation from you?" Rāma realised how Seeta felt. Even as he was pondering on what he should do, Seeta went into the palace, replaced her attire with bark clothing, came behind Rāma, caught hold of his long hands and stood by his side. On witnessing this act of Seeta, all who had gathered around her swooned and fell. They did not immediately die only because they were destined to live for some more time in this world. All women who were very dear to Seeta like a mother, a sister, a friend, or a companion were in great grief as though they were immersed in fire. *Red-eyed Rāma looked at pristine Seeta and said, "O possessor of teeth which can vanquish jasmine-buds or sea-pearls! Not realising the consequences of accompanying me to the forest, you have ventured to come with me! You will bring me endless troubles."* On hearing these words, Seeta frowned at Rāma! Like a sweetly lisping child she said, "My accompanying you appears to be your only agony. Will you attain complete happiness after discarding me?" The great Rāma did not say anything further.

The tears shed by the people made the streets appear like fields full of mire. Over these streets, the grieving men and women fell and wept. Rāma and Seeta went through these streets and crossed them with difficulty, unable to freely proceed because of the vast multitude of people. Followed by Seeta (Goddess Lakshmi), and with Lakshmana (holding the sturdy bow) in front, the cloud-complexioned Rāma walked on. The misery suffered by the people of Ayōdhya who witnessed this was beyond words! After a stage, none wailed or wept. All of them with depressed minds decided to reach the forest even before Rāma. Making a din similar to that heard during wars, they left at once. Rāma reached the gate of his father's palace. He bowed to his mothers and appealed to them to stay there and console the foremost member of their family, the emperor. The mothers fell down and swooned. Regaining consciousness, they shivered and lamented. Their tongues became dry. They blessed their son Rāma, extolled Seeta their daughter-in-law and lauded Lakshmana. They prayed to the Gods to protect the three. With great effort, Rāma took leave of his mothers. With folded hands, he paid homage to Sage Vasishtha who was standing before him. Accompanied by Lakshmana who was as dear to him as life, and Seeta who was none other than Goddess Lakshmi, Rāma boarded a chariot brought by Sumantira and left for the forest.

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5. DASARATHA'S BODY EMBALMED

Except Dasaratha's wives who could not leave him, and Ayōdhya's divine paintings which could not move because they were lifeless, there was none who did not accompany Rāma to the forest. The hot torrential tears shed by those who followed him, flowed throughout the path on which the golden chariot carrying him traversed. This unique chariot resembled the divine fish* which once swam across the big ocean during pralaya to save the lives of the world. Unable to bear the sight of Rāma, a scion of the Solar dynasty, leaving for the forest, the sun hid himself, and cows and buffaloes returned to their sheds. *The setting of the sun behind the western mountain brought out sparkling stars in the sky. The cluster of lotuses lost their lustre and became conical like the faces of the women of Ayōdhya created by the lotus-born Lord Brahma. Like the mind of Kaikeyi which was once good but subsequently became bad by consuming the poisonous advice of Mantarai, the sky lost its brightness and became dark.*

Rāma quickly left the beautiful city of Ayōdhya, crossed two yōjanas and reached a fragrant grove. He got down from the chariot and stayed with sages who spoke pleasant words. The members of royal families and other people who accompanied him stood outside the grove where he stayed. The crowd was so thick that there was no empty space, not even for a single grain of sesamum, for a distance of a whole yōjana. People stayed on high sandy areas, in fertile fields of green grass and in all places including the banks of the river. Young women (with eyes like black lilies) slept on beds made of cloth resembling the foam of hot milk. Over the laps of nursing mothers with breasts like tender coconuts, slept young girls with sweet words, sharp eyes and soft breasts. In the sandy hills full of flowers, young wives rested like young female elephants. Youthful heroes holding spears slept like male elephants with small eyes. Under a shamiana erected with creepers on a high, beautiful, clay platform, some of the women rested like herds of peacocks. Some other women slept on a raised sandy platform, in a grove of arecanut trees near the pond, like rows of young swans with feathers. Some women wearily slept in fragrant groves like fallen creepers. Some others, with their breasts covered, slept on sandy hillocks. With overflowing agony, young mothers, instead of enjoying the looks and the grace of their husbands (who practised penance through domestic virtues and attained greatness) slept (like weary

** An earlier incarnation of Lord Tirumāl*

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peahens) with their babes. Some women, with dust over their breasts (looking like snow-covered peaks of saffron hills) slept soundly. Some others, with their faces bereft of beauty like the conical lotuses, slept, using their own lovely hands as pillows.

While all slept, Rāma did not. He called aside Sumantira and told him, "O faultless one, there is something to be done by you. Please listen. These people have great love for me. It is not easy to send them back. At the same time, it would be a crime for me to leave this place without doing so. You are like my father! If you now direct the chariot back to our city, these people, when they wake up and see the chariot tracks, will conclude that I have gone back to the city and they will also return. That is what I beg of you." The expert charioteer Sumantira replied, "Compassionate as I am, if I were to leave you here and return to the city of Ayōdhya without giving up my life, I would be seeing the suffering of the people there caused by your absence. I would then be more cruel than the cruel Kaikeyi and the cruel destiny that drove you to this state. With a heart of steel, what am I to say there? Shall I say that I have left Rāma with his wife and brother to walk in the forest or shall I say I have returned to Ayōdhya bringing Rāma back with me? I happen to be your old friend. How can I say that allowing Seeta (who cannot walk even on flowers) and the mighty Rāma and Lakshmana to walk on the forest ground, I alone got into the chariot and came back? Mine is a mind ignorant as a stone! How can I go like Yama's messenger to the emperor who is already in great grief with a broken heart and on the verge of death, and convey your great words? Am I to kill the king who has momentarily become calm with the hope that all the people and the residents of the city would convince you and bring you back? Should I go and announce to the emperor that the leonine Rāma has gone to the forest? Even Kaikeyi will appear better than me." Falling at Rama's sacred feet, Sumantira rolled on the ground like a serpent writhing when it thunders, and requested Rāma with soothing words to return to Ayōdhya.

With his unique appearance (discerned only by the pristine knowledge of saints), Rāma, who is beyond the comprehension of the mind and the five senses which deserve to be kept under control, embraced Sumantira with his huge arms and wiped his tears. Asking him to be seated, Rāma told him, "You have an honest mind. You can properly examine and analyse the good and the bad of the event of birth. If I transgress the word of my father just because I am unwilling to undergo hardship, I will have to suffer great censure from the world at large. *Have you forgotten dharma which stands foremost among all that is good? It not only brings undying name and fame, to those who adhere to it, in this birth, but even renders immense good, in the next birth. When*

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dharma brings such great good it appears sweet. If, however, the same dharma brings sorrow can it be abandoned? It is not for using shining weapons, piercing the chest, or attaining victory that one is extolled as a hero. Only when a person (after losing all his wealth) does not give up dharma (even at the cost of endangering his life), is he extolled as a true hero. O possessor of a shining spear which can suck the life out of the enemy! If I were to return to the city, thinking of the hardship in the forest, will not the famous ancient Solar dynasty which brought forth great ones like Manu of celestial fame, be accused of forsaking dharma? Sending his most beloved son to the forest will be like a *laudable penance* for Dasaratha the upholder of arduous truth. Carrying out his commands and going to the forest will be a *great penance* for me. Dear Sumantira, do not therefore grieve.

"First, pay homage to Sage Vasishtha and then convey my respects and all that I have told you. Then go along with the sage and request him to convey my thoughts to my father. Tell my younger brother, Bharata, to seek the assistance of Sage Vasishtha and perform all acts which will please the Védic scholars and Devas in heaven. Also remove the pangs of separation suffered by Bharata because of my departure and tell Vasishtha to convey my advice to him (Bharata) not to harbour any ill-will towards his mother, Kaikeyi, nor to think that any great cruelty has been done to me. *Ask him to display towards her the same grace and love he has for me.* Go from here to the city of Ayōdhya and then proceed to the palace with Sage Vasishtha. Reach my valiant father, dispel his affliction and tell him that I seek a boon from him. It is that he should be gracious to my brother, Bharata. You must ensure that the king's benevolence is showered on him. Inform the possessor of mighty elephants (the king) through Vasishtha that I will quickly complete fourteen years in the forest and return to the city to pay homage to him and that he need not worry. Please convey my flawless respects to Kausalya who delivered me, and to my other mothers, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. After doing all this, remove the distress of the king and remain by his side."

Sumantira thought that the duty of the servant was to obey the commands of the master. He bowed to Rāma. He also bowed to Seeta and looked at her. She said, "Please convey, my respects to the emperor and to my mothers-in-law. Then tell my sisters to take care of the beautiful golden-coloured minah and the parrot brought up by me." On hearing Seeta's words, Sumantira broke down thinking of her future travails in the forest. "If due to fate, Seeta has to undergo hardship, who can save her? Unable to help her in the forest, I cannot even give up my life," felt Sumantira and

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wept uncontrollably. Bowing again to Rāma whom he always loved, Sumantira took his leave and asked Lakshmana whether he had any message to convey. Lakshmana said, "My king, Rāma, was assured of the inheritance of this great land but the kingdom was given to that woman, Kaikeyi. Am I to still consider this 'truthful' person a king, and send him a message? Tell that 'truthful' king who consumes the good food available in the palace (while his good son, Rāma eats tubers), how he still clings on to his life without going to heaven! Also, tell Bharata that I am neither born along with Rāma, my king, nor with Bharata who has usurped the kingdom which belonged to Rāma by right; that I am not even the elder brother of Satrughna; that as far as I am concerned, I am alone and I am strong." Rāma asked Lakshmana to desist from uttering such words. Thereafter, Sumantira whose heart ached at the imminent separation from Rāma, paid homage to him and took leave. Yoking the horses to the chariot kept in readiness, Sumantira indicated the route to them just by a sign. Without the knowledge of anybody, he drove the chariot quietly and efficiently. *After Sumantira departed, Rāma left the place in the dead of night protected only by Seeta's chastity, and his impartiality, boundless compassion, great knowledge, truthfulness, his sturdy bow and dear Lakshmana.*

Keeping company with demons indulging in deceitful acts, and abetting their heinous crimes, black night set in. Before long, the divine moon appeared as if the sky had brought in a lamp to drive away the darkness. The full moon which had risen in the sky like the face of divine dharma, appeared to have come there to see Rāma and Lakshmana, of mighty bows. The red lilies closed their petals in agony on seeing the pitiable condition of Rāma wading through the bamboo forest. Even the flowers which used to bloom at night felt sad and remained closed leaning forward like the head of a rat-snake. As though cotton was being spread throughout the forest to enable the dainty-footed Seeta with bow-like eyebrows to walk without strain, the moon spread its light all over the route taken by Rāma, Seeta and Lakshmana that night. With tiny soft feet softer than water-bubbles, with breasts big enough to strain her slender waist, Goddess Lakshmi (Seeta) walked behind Rāma in the forest, proving that there was nothing in this world mightier than unalloyed love. Before the sun could rise in the eastern horizon, Rāma had crossed a distance of two yōjanas.

We will now narrate what Sumantira (who left in the chariot drawn by swift horses) did. Deeply depressed and weeping bitterly, he reached the city of Ayōdhya in six nāzhigais. He went and bowed before Vasishtha. On learning all that happened, Vasishtha suffered from mental agony. As one who could forsee the future, he

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lamented that Dasaratha's life was finished. Vasishtha observed, "The charitable Rāma was firm on dharma, was afraid of the ever-growing blame that he would attract if he transgressed it, and therefore resisted my plea not to go to the forest. Is there anyone who can conquer destiny?" Vasishtha then went with Sumantira and entered the golden palace of Dasaratha. All in the royal assembly, including the ministers, saw the chariot and thought that Rāma had returned. They surrounded Dasaratha like a halo around the moon. But the dark-faced Rāma was not to be seen. They lost their cheer by merely looking at the grief-stricken charioteer, Sumantira's incessant tears. When those present shouted that the chariot had returned, Dasaratha thought that Rāma, too, had come back. Recovering from his stupor, he opened his eyes and asked Vasishtha eagerly whether Rāma the hero had come back. Unable to say 'no', Vasishtha felt sad and just stood. The face of that great Védic sage 'said' that Rāma had not returned. Dasaratha realised this and was in great agony. The sorrowful Vasishtha left the place saying that he could no longer watch this agonising sight. Dasaratha asked his charioteer Sumantira whether Rāma was far away or near by. Sumantira replied that Rāma, accompanied by Lakshmana and the golden daughter of Mithila, had entered the forest of bamboos! *As he was saying this, Dasaratha lost his life.*Devendra and other celestials felt happy that Dasaratha, the father of their father (Lord Tirumāl) had come to their celestial world. They placed Dasaratha in a moon-like, white, celestial chariot, carried it over their heads and took him to Lord Brahma's heaven which gave relief from the pangs of rebirth.

Frightened by Dasaratha's condition Kausalya touched his body. Finding that there was neither life nor heartbeat in him, she realised that Dasaratha was dead. She fell down in anguish and writhed like a boneless worm baking in the heat of summer. She suffered like the Devas losing the nectar of immortality. She was depressed like a serpent that has lost its rare and unique ruby. She began to lament like a female nightingale forsaken by her mate. She said, "The king, who had never known defeat in his life, has mercilessly deserted all of us and gone alone." She trembled like the fishes in a pond which has gone dry with no rains from the sky nor any spring in its bed. *Kausalya lamented, "The benefits arising from begetting children are manifold. The son ensures that his parents go to heaven instead of hell, and protects them from hardship in this world. No grief will come to such fortunate parents. But my son, Rāma, at the time of the death of his father is not by my side to console me. He has killed his father by going to the forest. The heroic king has not laid down his life, because of any illness, or any attack by deadly weapons like the mighty sword or a*

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shining spear. His death is entirely due to his children. He is like the lobster, the shell fish, the fruit-bearing plantain and the bamboo, which give up their lives while bringing forth their offspring." Uttering these words, Kausalya swooned.

Again looking at Kaikeyi, Kausalya said, "O daughter of Kekaya, you cleverly obtained the kingdom from the king through boons he could not deny you. Have you now concluded your plot?" Kausalya then fell over the bosom of Dasaratha and rolled like lightning moving on a cloud. She wailed aloud, "O conqueror of Camparāsura, the Devas live on happily because of your mercy. Today, you have become their guest." Kausalya was like a female elephant drowned in grief after losing the male leader! "O king, will you perform yāgas in heaven, too, and reap their benefits? Will you also obtain the happiness derived from adhering to dharma? Will you enjoy the bliss of heavenly life, having lived here following the flawless and imperishable tenets of Manu?" lamented Kausalya, who had borne an incomparable son, enabling the Devas to enjoy the treasure known as Rāma's fame! As Kausalya, the great queen of Dasaratha, lamented, her companion Sumitra who was also in agony became weary and swooned. While the palace was in a state of confusion, as if pralaya was in sight, the rest of the queens wept aloud around the body of their husband who was their very life. They all trembled as though they had consumed poison. They did not swoon nor were they frightened because they had firmly decided to follow the noble-minded deceitless Dasaratha to heaven. Could there be anything mightier than love? Dasaratha's sixty thousand wives who could be compared to none in all the worlds, whose faces were like the flawless moon, gathered in the palace. They were like peacocks on an immobile mountain surrounded by a river in flood. These women clung to the body of truthful Dasaratha who, separated from his son (because of the harsh words of Kaikeyi), had lost his life. They appeared like those who clung to a boat that would take them across the shark-ridden ocean of illusion! Meanwhile flawless Kausalya and her younger sister, Sumitra, became exhausted and lost their nerve.

Sumantira the charioteer came out and announced the death of Dasaratha. Vasishtha who heard this came to the site where the body of Dasaratha was kept and grieved at the havoc caused by fate. While the ministers wondered what to do in the absence of the sons who should perform the last rites, they also realised that what ought to be done had to be done. Finally they decided to start the ceremonies only after the return of Bharata, the son of the wicked Kaikeyi. *They took the body of Dasaratha from the midst of a sea of women and placed it in a 'sea' of oil.* Sage Vasishtha asked the sixty thousand wives of Dasaratha, who had surrounded his body, to leave

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the place and bade Kausalya and Sumitra to go to their respective mansions. The royal order to bring Bharata to Ayōdhya was written on a palm leaf by the sage. He handed it over to the messengers, who, under his instructions, proceeded forthwith to the beautiful capital city of Kekaya. Directing Sumantira to discharge the duties that required immediate attention, the great and knowledgeable Vasishtha left for his hermitage, the abode of dharma. Let us now narrate what happened to the people who had accompanied Rāma and slept in the grove.

With the sea roaring, the Devas praying and the people of the earth paying homage to him, the sun rose in the radiant single-wheeled chariot and through his widespread rays seemed to proclaim, "Dasaratha, an illustrious son of our dynasty has reached heaven. His sons are far away from Ayōdhya. Until their return, I shall be guarding this land." The citizens of Ayōdhya who had accompanied Rāma had never suffered from grief before. Unbearable agony had made them fall asleep. Believing that the magnificent Rāma was still with them, they woke from their sleep, and looked for him. They were perplexed by his absence. They fell on the ground, rolled and cursed themselves for sleeping. They felt that their eyes (which ought to have been wide open all the time) had plotted against them to kill them. They searched for Rāma in all the eight directions. They broke down again and again, unable to bear the grief. They lamented that Rāma had pushed them into a sea of agony and had gone. They cried that Rāma who had always been their undisputed leader, had been cruel in deserting them. Consoling themselves that Rāma had left for the Dandaka forest which was after all only in this world, they decided to follow the tracks of the chariot. When they found that the tracks turned towards Ayōdhya, they were elated and felt as if their lost lives were restored. "Nobody need have any fear. Our master has returned to the city of Ayōdhya," they declared jubilantly. The din they made sounded like the sea and the clouds roaring in ecstasy. They said, "Rāma who humbled Manmatha in beauty, has returned to the city of Ayōdhya." They all appeared like persons who, after having been injected with a deadly poison through the sharp teeth of serpents, had their lives restored by consuming the nectar of immortality. They were happy that the chariot-tracks led to the city. Like the pralaya sea rising and then subsiding, they finally reached Ayōdhya. They heard that Dasaratha had gone to the celestial world and also learnt that Rama, the rightful heir to the kingdom, had actually gone to the forest. Their agony and heartache defied description. The only reason they could not die as they wished was because they were destined to live for some more time. Like those caught miserably in a prison of sorrow, they lamented that they were neither by the side of Dasaratha at the time of his death, nor were helpful to Rāma in the forest.

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Sage Vasishta appeared before them and said, "Only for fear of censure, have I not given up my life." With several words of comfort, Vasishtha tried to console the citizens. Commanded by him, they remained calm like the deep sea which does not cross its shores in spite of overflowing with water. Let us now narrate the activities of Rāma who had left for the forest in the dead of night in obedience to Dasaratha's command brought about by the penance of the Devas.

6. MOTHER GANGA

Possessing a radiance, in which even the light of the sun would get lost, handsome Rāma (of rare and immortal grandeur and a divine complexion) made one wonder whether it was black collyrium or an emerald or a rain-shedding black cloud or a tidal sea that walked along with Seeta and Lakshmana! Pious Seeta, with an invisible waist, with a voice as clear and sweet as nectar and with incomparable black sand-like hair, and Rāma with the majestic gait of a bull saw a happy male swan playing with a young female swan. With eyes that had vanquished the arrows of both Manmatha and Rāma (by gauging them with her wisdom, and with glances that would put poison to shame) Seeta saw Rāma's feet merrily conquer lotuses swarming with bees. Seeta with a forehead like a crescent moon beneath her fragrant tresses, and Rāma with coral-like lips, were seen walking together like a streak of lightning with a dark cloud, or a female elephant with a male elephant. Rāma saw a heap of lilies plucked from the fields lying abandoned on the wayside. These flowers appeared to him like the eyes of parrot-like Seeta, whose voice was sweeter than the nectarous music that flowed from the holes of a flute, or from the strings of a yāzh, and sweeter than honey or sugar candy. Her breasts were like lotus buds, or sacred urns full of the nectar of immortality, or the tusks of a rutting elephant. Her hair resembled dark clouds. In the company of mountain-shouldered Rāma, Seeta had fun all the way. Feasting their eyes on places where swans slept, water sources with plenty of lotuses, heaps of sand where conches were strewn, gardens full of several big flowers and rivers that brought gold in their flow, and other such pleasant scenes, Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta moved on happily. They saw sugar-cane factories. They saw buffaloes eat tender sheaves of paddy with milky juice oozing out of the sides of their mouths and flowing in streams. They saw bees on the sweet flowers in water-sources rising as a swarm, annoyed by the sél and kayal fishes jumping in the water. They saw women with crimson legs bathing like swans in the running streams.

Crossing the borders of the fertile land of Kōsala, Rāma, Seeta and Lakshmana reached the banks of the River Ganga where blemishless sages who were lofty Védic

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scholars, lived. These sages rushed to meet Rāma, convinced that the God whom they were hoping to see through penance had arrived. They saw Rāma as the embodiment of a form that gave everyone a kind of pleasure that defied description and a kind of bliss realised only through divine music. On seeing him, the sages became immensely happy just as worldly men attain great pleasure listening to exquisite women or dining with them. Welcoming Rāma, these sages extolled him and danced in ecstasy. *Looking upon him as nectar, they 'drank' him with their eyes.* They were like pining parents joyous at the unexpected home-coming of a lost son! They escorted Rāma, Seeta and Lakshmana to their hermitage. *The three were drenched by them with tears of joy, garlanded with flowery words, and fed with the nectar of undiminishing love, and were freed from all fatigue.*

Along with Seeta, a beacon for all married women, Rāma bathed in the Ganga which was created when Lord Brahma washed the feet of Trivikrama, an earlier incarnation of Mahāvishnu. The immortal Mother Ganga bowed to Rāma and told him, "While the sins and impurities of countless people of the world were absolved by me, I stand emancipated from all those accumulated sins because of your bathing here." As chaste Seeta watched Rāma bathing in the Ganga, Rāma (with matted locks of hair from which the white Ganga water dripped) looked like Lord Siva (with matted locks from which Ganga flowed) dancing to the merriment of his consort the chaste Uma! After bathing with Seeta in the Ganga, Rāma rose with her as Lord Tirumāl had once risen from the ocean of milk along with Goddess Lakshmi! As doll-like Seeta (washing her dainty feet with a lotion of red cotton flowers) bathed in the River Ganga, the vanji creeper felt shy looking at her slender waist. Unable to compete with her gait, the swans went away. Looking at her lovely feet, the lotuses felt ashamed, while her sharp eyes made the fish disappear. The fragrance of the flowers around Lord Siva's tuft might not have appealed to Ganga; she was, however, impressed with the aroma of musk and the fragrance of flowers adorning the hair of Seeta! With the foam that floated on her flowing waves, Ganga looked like a grey-haired woman. *Feeling intensely for the loneliness of Seeta (who had no female companion though adored by all), Ganga bathed her with her waves as a nurse would bathe her ward.* Seeta's flowing tresses looked like clouds spreading out in rows over Ganga, or like the overflowing water of the dark Yamuna merging with the Ganga. Seeta (with her eyes rolling like the sél fish) rose from the white water of the Ganga, like Goddess Lakshmi rising from the ocean of milk. It was during the incarnation of Trivikrama (none other than Rāma) that Ganga had attained sanctity by coming into

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contact with His sacred lotus feet. *When Ganga was able to touch the entire body of Rāma, how can any worldly being bathing in Ganga go to hell?* After bathing in the pure water of Ganga, Rāma went to the abode of the sages, offered prayers to the Supreme Lord, and dined with the sages as their guest. *Rāma who as Lord Tirumāl had given away (to the Devas) the rare nectar of immortality, now ate the leaves and grass offered by the sages and was immensely pleased, thereby showing that any offering, however simple, if given with a noble and pure mind would never lose its greatness.*

7. GUHAN

Guhan, the owner of a thousand boats, arrived when Rāma had finished partaking of the food offered by the sages. Guhan enjoyed the right of rowing boats across the pure Ganga. Sporting long and strong shoulders, he had with him a bow capable of killing his foes, a drum called tudi, hounds to assist him in his hunting, broad feet with leather footwear and a complexion similar to dense darkness. As he was always surrounded by his army, he would come like the rain-bearing black thunderous clouds spread over the sky. His army was supplemented with various instruments like the conch, a variety of drums and arrows in the shape of leaves. Guhan had a large circle of relatives resembling herds of rutting elephants. He was verily the captain of boatmen. He had tigers' tails tied in knots fastened around his waist, and a red piece of leather hanging down his hips. Guhan was renowned for having found the depth of the River Ganga. He wore multicoloured ornaments which looked like chains of teeth, and heroes' anklets which looked like chains of stones. Over his dark hair were inserted select sheaves of paddy. He had curved eyebrows which he would raise when he was angry. Guhan had mighty forearms with dense beautiful hair. He had a broad and rock-like chest. *His black complexion was like darkness soaked in oil.* Guhan had a lustrous blood-stained sword. He had cruel eyes which frightened even poisonous cobras. He spoke rashly and had hips as strong as the thunderbolt of Devendra. Guhan who belonged to a city called Sringaberam near River Ganga, had come to the hermitage of the sages with offerings of honey and fish to see Rāma. With great love for him and with a mind devoid of duplicity, Guhan removed his bow and arrows and sword, kept his relatives at a distance and entered the hermitage where Rāma was staying. Even before Guhan gave a call, Lakshmana approached him and asked him who he was. Taking Lakshmana to be Rāma, Guhan bowed to him with affection and replied that he, as humble as a dog, was a hunter who rowed boats and that he had come to pay homage to him. Asking Guhan to remain there, Lakshmana went into the hermitage

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and informed Rāma that a person named Guhan, with a good heart, nobler than a mother and a captain of boatmen who plied across the tidal waters of Ganga, had come to see him with a host of relatives. Rāma was pleased and asked Lakshmana to bring Guhan to him. Lakshmana accordingly told Guhan to enter. The loving Guhan quickly got in and feasted his eyes on the great Rāma with handsome eyes.

With his black tuft touching the ground, Guhan bowed to Rāma. He then stood with his body bent and his hands over his mouth. Even when Rāma offered him a seat, Guhan would not sit. *Out of his boundless love, Guhan requested Rāma to accept his offerings of honey and fish. Looking at the elderly sages with a smile, Rāma told Guhan, "Out of sincere devotion, prompted by great love, you have brought honey and fish which I consider greater than even nectar. Whatever you have brought, because it is offered with abundant love, can only be pure and fit for our acceptance. It may therefore be assumed that we have eaten it with immense pleasure.* We will be staying in this hermitage today and will be crossing the Ganga tomorrow. For the present you may leave this place with your fine relatives and stay in your city. Please come here with your boat, early tomorrow morning, and take us across the river." Guhan who loved Rāma intensely, replied, "O holder of the entire world as your wealth! I consider myself a thief for not plucking out and discarding my eyes which see you in this garb. With such agony in my mind, I cannot leave you and go back to my abode. I will continue to remain here and work as your slave." Looking at the faces of Seeta and Lakshmana, which confirmed the acceptance of Guhan's spontaneous affection, Rāma said, "Guhan has boundless love for us." With compassion in his eyes, Rāma looked at Guhan and said, "Please stay with us." When Guhan asked Rāma why he had left the beautiful city of Ayōdhya and come there, Lakshmana told him about the agony Rāma had gone through. Guhan became sorrowful. Shedding torrential tears, he said, "How strange it is that Mother Earth, despite her great penance, could not reap the benefits."

Like the strong, heroic and kind Dasaratha who rose above everyone, wielded his sceptre in a unique manner, established a name, earned a place in the hearts of all in this huge world, and finally gave up his life, the red-rayed sun disappeared. Rāma and Seeta finished their evening chores and rested on a fine 'mat' made of reeds. Lakshmana held the sturdy bow ready in his hand and stood guard, without even blinking his eyes, till dawn. Surrounded by a host of relatives with raised bows and arrows, Guhan, possessing unblinking eyes and an unsteady mind due to excessive

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anger, saw Lakshmana keeping watch without even shutting his eyes while Rāma slept. He shed copious tears and stood like a rock watching the sight.

Though the sun does not suffer from the infirmity of births (unlike the mortals on earth), as if to show that all mortals with endless births are bound to die and be reborn, the sun disappeared in the evening and rose again the next morning. The sun thus made people seek a kind of bliss transcending heaven, by releasing themselves from the chain of births and deaths! The lotuses that sprang from the mire, blossomed with a bright, red colour on seeing the hot rays of the sun from the sky. On seeing a different sun (Rāma), possessing the colour of black collyrium, the sharp lotus face of creeper-like Seeta also bloomed. After the morning chores, Rāma followed by the sages left the hermitage and asked faithful Guhan to bring a good boat for crossing the Ganga. Listening to Rāma's commands, a tearful Guhan fell at his feet and said, "O lord wearing a garland of flowers, we do not lead a false life; we are only forest dwellers; we are mighty; and, we will carry out your commands in a proper manner. Please treat all of us as your kith and kin and stay here happily for a long time. We have honey and millets which are fit even for the consumption of the Devas. We also have meat with us. Our lives are there to serve you like dogs. This forest is there for sport, and the River Ganga is there for bathing. As long as I am alive, kindly stay here happily. Leather-like fine cloth can be had for clothing; varieties of dainty food, hanging cots (for sleeping) and small huts (for living) are also available. Our legs are there for moving briskly and our hands are there to fight with bows. Even if you desire something from the very skies, we will get it for you at once. Five hundred thousand hunters who serve me with their bows are at your disposal. We will consider ourselves redeemed even if you stay with us just for a day. There can be no greater life for us than this." Rāma, who had great compassion for Guhan, listened to his words attentively and smiled. He said, "O hero, we will bathe in all the sacred rivers, and pay obeisance to the most revered sages en route. After completing the stipulated few days in the forest, we will certainly come back to you with pleasure." Understanding the mind of Rāma, Guhan left and quickly brought a big boat. Taking leave of the sages and saints, Rāma got into the boat along with Seeta and Lakshmana. Guhan rowed the big boat, which glided (like a young swan) smoothly and quickly over the tidal waters of the Ganga. The hearts of the sages who stood on the river bank, unable to bear separation from Rāma, melted like wax before fire.

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Seeta with a voice sweet as milk and Rāma resembling the sun, splashed the divine water of the vast Ganga on each other happily. *The big boat, steered by a long pole with a leather top, urged by Rāma, moved swiftly like a huge crab with many legs. The great dame (River Ganga) appeared to have lifted the boat and enabled it to move to the opposite bank with her red lotus-like 'hands', the waves!* On reaching his destination, Rāma looked at Guhan and said, "Tell me the way to reach Citrakootam." Devoted Guhan, ready to give up his life for Rāma, bowed before him and said, "Slave as I am, I had the good fortune to accompany you like a dog so far. I know very well the direct route, cross roads, short cuts and branch routes and can guide you properly. I can bring good vegetables, fruits and honey. I can put up small huts here and there for your stay. *I cannot, however, leave you even for a moment.* I have unique capabilities to prevent wild animals from surrounding your habitation. I can even destroy them without allowing them to come close to you. I can locate good-natured deer, peacocks and other fauna, show them to you, and bring them to you in no time. I will carry out your commands implicitly. Knowing all the routes, I can lead you during nights, too. O proud possessor of a wrestler's shoulders, even in the hilly tracts which have to be crossed, I can dig up and bring you rare tubers; I can bring water even from a distant place. I have a variety of bows. I am not afraid of anything. *The only thing I cannot do, is to leave your divine feet.* If you agree, I will come here with my entire army and be with you always. Even if enemies whom I cannot conquer come here, I will lay down my life before anything happens to you. Blemishless as I am, I shall come with you."

The flawless Rāma, listening to affectionate Guhan, replied, "I adore you as my own life. My younger brother, Lakshmana, is also *your* younger brother. This Seeta with a beautiful forehead is *your* relative. The entire land surrounded by the sea is *yours. Remember that only because there is sorrow in life, is there happiness, too.* Neither concern yourself about the future, nor worry about the transient agony of separation. *Before seeing you and befriending you, we were only four brothers; now with our unending love, we have become five.* During all the days of my stay in the forest, your younger brother, Lakshmana, will be with me. Therefore, who can harm me? You are duty-bound to return home and protect your people as I would do. The day I am back on my way to Ayōdhya, I will come to you. While your younger brother, Bharata, is eminently suited to protect our kith in Ayōdhya, who is there to protect our kith here if you come with me? Are not your relatives my relatives, too? Is it proper to allow my relatives to suffer for want of a protector? Accept my command with

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pleasure and look after them." Guhan could not disobey Rāma. Unable to get rid of the agony of separation from him, a sad Guhan finally took leave of Rāma. Along with peacock-like Seeta, Rāma and Lakshmana walked into the forest full of dense rows of trees.

8. ENTERING THE FOREST

As Rāma walked in the forest, in that early summer when one wonders if air does contain moisture or not, the dark sky full of clouds carrying cool water began to show signs of rain. The sun spread his rays with intermittent coolness, like the tender moon. The clouds presented drops of dew-like rain. The early southern breeze blew gently, carrying along with it the fragrance of flowers, while Rāma proceeded with Seeta and Lakshmana through the forest pathways where peacocks danced. Looking at Seeta, Rāma said, "O damsel with the complexion of a peacock and the look of a fawn wearing a garland of fragrant flowers! Watch the swarm of cochineals 'resting' on clusters of cassia flowers all over the forest, shining like golden chains studded with lustrous gems. With young bees singing, and the rain pattering down, the happy peacocks dance, but feel shy on seeing your form. O pleasant woman resembling a tender mango leaf, look at those lovely red-beaked parrots (which deserve to be held in your hands) perched on those bright red flowers! You of eyes resembling véls smeared with ghee! Looking at your complexion and your eyes, peacocks and fawns mistaking you for one of their kind, flock towards you. O pious woman comparable to Arundati! O damsel sweeter than honey! See the exceptional beauty of those flaming asoka flowers which look like fire created by blowing hot charcoal for melting gold. O possessor of a beauty which cannot be painted, look at that joyous peacock mistaking the bud of a flower for a snake and grasping it by the mouth, making even the sweet jasmine flowers 'smile' derisively! See the strange sight of cubs of mountain tigers, female baby-elephants and calves playing gleefully without animosity and unwilling to part from each other!

"Look at those flowering creepers with rows of beautiful flowers taking a dip in the river like young women with budding breasts. You, with a bow-like forehead! Look at those small bees buzzing on those big buds of flowers, sucking nectar from them and sleeping there, providing the unique sight of a blue gem-studded golden plate! Look at the dark-complexioned big male bees, dazed by drinking too much nectar, finding it difficult to follow the female bees! O damsel with the gait of a swan! All trees here appear to have learnt (like a maiden) the art of beautifying themselves, and are

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shedding beautiful golden-coloured flowers like the flowers embracing your hair above the forehead. O lady lovelier than the forest goddess! The pollen (from the cluster of fragrant flowers) settled on stones, appears like the spots on the upper side of the skin of your breasts adorned by a chain of pearls! O woman with the sweet voice of a nightingale! All the pathways we traverse now are covered with soft flowers, probably to protect your tender feet from the stones. Look at the rows of trees and their branches with fragrant flowers bending, ashamed to compete with your slim waist. O woman with sword-like eyes! The tender leaves with stalks and bees over there, resemble your flower-like feet with their anklets; the clouds which you see above are like your fragrant hair the darkness of which shuts out other objects; and the tender bamboos seen yonder, appear like your shoulders! See there, the beauty of flowers and buds blooming in plenty, interspersed with flocks of birds. See the multi-coloured cool creepers looking like a curtain containing artistic works in red, resembling a fire in these forests where herds of deer, peacocks and cuckoos live happily!" Saying several such things, broad-shouldered Rāma walked merrily along with young Seeta in a playful mood. With the setting of the sun, Rāma, Seeta and Lakshmana sighted a mountain and stood there observing, "That must be the Citrakootam inhabited by the great sages who have conquered sin and evil."

Eagerly awaiting Rāma with abundant love and a feeling of ecstasy, realising that the reward for his great penance had arrived, the eminent sage, Bharadwaja, came out to welcome him. The sage had an umbrella, a water jug and also the sacred stick of an ascetic. He had a plaited tuft. The upper half of his body was covered with the skin of a deer, and the lower half with the bark of a tree. With an impeccable character, he always followed the virtuous path. *He possessed a tongue on which the four Védas danced. His wealth was the red sacrificial fire. He considered all beings created by Lord Brahma as his own and protected them. He could, if asked, create the seven worlds, without the help of Lord Tirumāl's navel!* When Sage Bharadwaja stood before Rāma, the latter showered flowers on him, offered prayers and bowed to him thrice. Embracing him, Bharadwaja shed tears that he had to see him in the attire of an ascetic. He asked Rāma, "O mighty archer, when you are entitled to rule the entire land, why have you and your brother come to this forest which is the abode of sages like us? Why should you give up the kingdom and take to this unsuitable garb of an ascetic at this young age?" Rāma told the sage all that had happened. The great Bharadwaja remarked that it was all the work of fate. He felt sad that there was no way of reversing these evil happenings. Stating that the proud Goddess Earth had not

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done enough penance to attain Rāma as her king, Bharadwaja asked, "How could my good friend, Dasaratha, continue to live after ordering his son Rāma to go to the forest, especially after first asking this unique son (along with the pure-tongued Seeta) to rule the world surrounded by the sea?" Bharadwaja then consoled himself by saying, "It is natural for everyone to experience sorrow as well as happiness based on good and bad deeds." Embracing Rāma, Sage Bharadwaja led him, Seeta and Lakshmana to his hermitage, providing them with a place to stay. He fed them with ripe fruits and vegetables. He extolled them and gave them good advice, treating them more fondly than his very life and made them happy.

Rāma, Seeta and Lakshmana stayed in the hermitage joyously. Sage Bharadwaja thought that if he lived with Rāma, he would attain the bliss of heavenly life and did everything to please him. Looking at his face, Bharadwaja said, "We have plenty of water, flowers, exceptional fruits, vegetables and roots here with nothing wanting, including pious activities. There cannot be a better place even for those intending to perform great yāgas. O lord with lovely eyes and lotus feet, this place is the renowned confluence of the Rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. Even Lord Brahma cannot aspire to get this sacred water. Knowing that it is hard to come by a place like this, persons like us never depart from here. All of you can stay in this place of renown." Rāma replied, "O noble sage, this place is not far from the fertile land of Kōsala. If I stay here for long, the people of Kōsala will come here." Bharadwaja agreed and said, "What you say could happen. Please listen to me. After crossing ten kādams* from this grove, you will see Citrakootam which is worthy of worship even by the Devas and is a place which will give greater happiness than the celestial world. You may stay there." Rāma then fell at the divine feet of Bharadwaja and took his leave.

Rāma, Seeta and Lakshmana left the hermitage and passed through a sylvan tract inhabited by shepherds holding flutes made of cassia. Covered with dust, they reached the banks of the Yamuna after crossing beautiful hill tracts. In the mean time, the sun with his red rays, reached the zenith. On learning of Yamuna's eminence, they paid homage to the river and bathed in her deep waters. Then they ate roots and sweet fruits and drank the water. The moment Rāma asked how they would cross the Yamuna, Lakshmana cut resilient bamboos, bound them strongly with creepers and made a raft. Rāma and Seeta boarded it. Possessing mountain-like shoulders, Lakshmana swam and pushed the raft with his two hands, alternately towards the east and the west. Rāma, Seeta and Lakshmana, looking fresh, crossed the Yamuna.

* *A kādam is ten miles.*

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They walked for a long distance and came to an agonising desert where the ground, the trees, the branches, roots and tree-tops were scorched. Even the mind which thought of it was burnt. Rāma feared that Seeta might not have the stamina to cross it.

The moment Rāma set foot on the desert, however, the sun gave moon-like rays. Green leaves sprouted on the scorched trees. All the places which had earlier displayed the fury of fire, now transformed themselves into pools bearing lotuses. Sharp, sturdy, hot pebbles became instantly cool with moisture, like fresh flowers. Ferocious serpents found nectar dripping from their poisonous fangs and shed their fury. Clouds began showering rain. Hunters with well-equipped bows gave up their anger and like saints gracefully desisted from taking away life. Fierce animals ceased to be ferocious. Even tigresses suckled fawns! The dry dense bamboo forests about to be burnt, got transformed into fresh green ones. Dry grass suddenly became fresh, appearing like a well-spread green blanket. Peacocks spread their feathers and danced while bees sang sweet songs. Fruits ripened out of season and long tubers were seen all over without even their roots. *Flowery creepers looked like beautiful girls, proving that no penance could bring greater happiness than the exquisite presence of Rāma, Seeta and Lakshmana.* After the arrival of Rāma the desert which was raging like the minds of women whose husbands had left them and gone to the front became cool like the minds of the very same women when their husbands wearing heroes' anklets returned home. Rāma, Seeta and Lakshmana walked slowly in that desert which shed its purposeless character and attained prosperity. They saw the Citrakoota mountain, where mistaking a thunder cloud for its female partner, a male elephant, extended its big, long trunk towards the cloud into which the crescent moon disappeared.

9. CITRAKOOTAM

Displaying universal grace to the Devas as well as the humans, the impeccable Rāma showed and explained to young Seeta, the grandeur of the Citrakoota mountain full of gold and dense sandalwood trees. He told her, "O possessor of eyes resembling the sword and the vél! Look at the plants and green trees on the glorious mountain slopes, with long rows of black moist clouds resembling elephants! See the wild mountain-goats leaping and reaching the top of the mountain surrounded by precious emeralds whose lustre is like the Védas. O young peacock wearing ornaments! Look at the shining skins of huge pythons

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entangled in the bamboos (moving like flags flying on the mansions of Ayōdhya) surrounded by groves. O damsel resembling nectar from the ocean of milk and not from the saltish sea! You will find plenty of rubies shedding red rays on the mountain peak where the moon halts. The pure crystal water cascading from the peak, looks like the water of Ganga on the tuft of Lord Siva. O lady resembling a creeper! The moon, as if wanting to depart from its heavenly orbit, is traversing through a sandalwood grove resembling a honeycomb. See that male elephant with crescent tusks, melting with love for his pregnant young mate, driving away the bees swarming round that honeycomb, and taking out the honey to feed her! Just as Lord Tirumāl, though invisible to others, is visible to the ascetics who have conquered the five senses, those Kinnarās (with the face of a horse and the body of a man) hiding there are visible in between the marble rocks.

"See the honey trickling from honeycombs, filling the pits caused by tribals digging up edible roots with their iron hoes. O personification of glorious femininity! Look at those female monkeys splashing water with affection on male monkeys; and the sight of the male monkeys climbing the peak of the mountain and crushing the clouds hovering there so that drops of rain may fall on their mates. O wickless lamp with nectar (as ghee)! Look over there, at the heaps of beautiful ruby rocks dispelling darkness with their widespread light like another sun. O Lakshmi who taught what chastity is, even to Arundati! Look at the small vengai branches bending with the weight of the bees and straightening out as soon as they leave. These branches appear to be sprinkling golden flowers at your feet (as if to pay homage to you) and are rising again. O lady resembling tender leaves! O wearer of lustrous ornaments! Yonder on the peak of the lofty mountain where the sun crawls, women with sharp eyes like deadly véls stand, protecting the millets. The ruby stones they have thrown to scare the birds away fall like stars from the sky! The hunters holding sturdy, mighty bows have burnt the aquila wood cut by them with their axes. The dense aquila smoke mingling with the smoke arising from the sacred fire resembles the peak of a dark mountain. O peacock with a slender waist unable to bear the weight of your cloud-like long hair with its scent of civet, ghee, fresh fragrant flowers, smoke of aquila and musk! Look at the fishes (stars) in the river (sky)! See the fragrant celestial karpaga flowers discarded from the black sand-like hair of celestial women who are getting ready to bathe in the mountain stream which carries precious gems in its flow. Look at that male monkey beating the drum kept by hunters wearing heroes' anklets. You

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can see yonder, an ignorant tribal woman attempting to wipe the crescent moon and remove its blot! Dear Seeta, the very thought of you brings to me the sweetness of nectar! See over there, vengai and konga trees full of honey. Look at the swings bending the branches of the trees to which they are tied; and the young tribal girls sitting and singing sweet songs with a kurinji touch, putting the fierce fauna to sleep. O Seeta with scarlet lips like the silk-cotton flower! Look at the stream, formed by cool waterfalls from the mountains, flowing with the fragrance of karpaga flowers and sandalwood paste of the celestial women bathing in it. Look at the beautiful mountain wearing a 'crown' made of pure gold as the shining sun reaches its golden peak!

"O vermilion for women, look at the pearls of bamboo-shoots in the midst of red ruby gems in the huge rocks appearing like bright stars in the crimson twilight sky! O parrot with a voice sweeter than the music of flute and yāzh! Look at those trees where red flowers have bloomed densely in different places, presenting an illusion of a raging fire. See the big elephants with their young ones taking water from the stream through their long dangling punctured trunks, and pouring it into the vessels of the aged sages performing penance! Look at the male monkeys mercifully extending their long tails to the old sages with failing sight, enabling them to hold them and move in the right direction! See how the slim peacocks expand their feathers and fan the fire in the hot pit to help the sages to conduct yāgas. O Lakshmi-like exquisite model for women! See how the male monkeys lovingly bring jackfruit, big mangoes and plantains for the sages. See how boars bring tubers for them. You can also see parrots with red heads (resembling your red palms) gathering grains of paddy, millet, maize and fine rice from bamboo shoots, and bringing them to the hermitage of the great sages who have forced vices to retreat! *See how the wild mountain snakes which have swallowed ferocious tuskers, appear calm like well-read scholars, and lie on the hill slopes, acting as steps for flawless sages to climb.* See also the sky over the mountain where springs flow and glittering golden chariots move hither and thither, granting a heavenly abode to those who worship God through overflowing tears of compassion."

Rāma showed Seeta these sights and proceeded towards the Citrakoota mountain. The sages living there welcomed them. Rāma bowed to all these great Védic scholars and became their guest. The sun who was like Lord Tirumāl's disc which killed the Asura Kālanemi, reached the western mountain full of groves. While the sky became

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red like the blood that flowed from this Asura after his body was hit by the disc of Tirumāl, the crescent moon that appeared in the sky, resembled the white tooth that fell from the Asura's mouth. After the setting of the sun, the lotus flowers closed their petals adding beauty to the faces of women. White lilies bloomed in all the large water sources and shone brightly like stars. As the moon rose in the sky, monkeys of both sexes went in search of suitable trees, while male and female elephants went to the foot of the hills to spend the night, and innocent birds flew towards their nests. Rāma (discerned only through true knowledge) went to perform his evening chores. Some of the flawless fragrant flowers blossomed while some of them closed their petals!

A cottage was built by Lakshmana the bowman. He cut long bamboos, reduced them into small sticks and fixed them in rows. He laid the roof of the cottage with the leaves of the teak tree. He fortified the cottage with vertically erected bamboo walls. Between these bamboos, he packed mud, sprinkled water over it and spread it uniformly. For Rāma and Seeta, he arranged separate enclosures built in accordance with the rules of architecture. He painted the inside of the cottage with a paste of vermilion to make it beautiful. On the walls, he stuck gems and pearls from the river. He beautified the cottage with hangings of leaves and grass. With suitable bamboos and peacock feathers he put up attics on the walls and sprinkled beautiful and fragrant flowers everywhere so that the entire place looked prosperous. *The omnipresent Rāma, along with the golden-coloured Seeta, occupied the beautiful cottage constructed by Lakshmana. Resembling the minds of saints who were relieved of the deception of illusion, this cottage was like the great Védas, the pure ocean of milk and Vaikuntham the abode of Lord Mahāvishnu. Rāma, with his heart filled with love and his mind full of satisfaction, was glad to live in this cottage. He thought, "The feet (softer than flowers) of the daughter of Janaka have traversed this forest. The hands of my flawless brother have put up this cottage. What is there that cannot be achieved even by those who possess nothing?"* Shedding copious tears of gratitude, Rāma asked Lakshmana, "O possessor of mountain-like shoulders, where did you learn the art of putting up such a beautiful cottage?" Feeling sorry for Lakshmana, Rāma said again, "What is the use of the people of the world extolling me because, commanded by Dasaratha, I willingly gave up the kingdom, opted for the forest and attained true fame like the sun when in reality, I have actually given *you* agony for a long period?" An aggrieved Lakshmana replied, "O father-like lord, did my sorrow not start the moment the Emperor said you had no right to rule the kingdom?" *Rāma saw the*

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The faces of the people of Ayōdhya had lost their radiant smiles; mansions had lost the fragrance of the smoke of aquila; palace lamps had lost their burning flames; and the hair of women had lost their fragrant flowers. *Fertile green crops grown by the side of broad tanks withered for want of water due to the unopened sluices, like mendicants standing before the closed gates of merciless misers.* The once fertile land of Kōsala that defied description, appeared to have lost its charm. With the goddess of wealth deserting Kōsala the land looked like a body without life. Bharata who was unaware of what had happened, was very sad to see his country in this state. Inferring that he would be hearing some bad news in the palace, Bharata was shaken, and sighed deeply. *The noble Bharata, the son of the wearer of the great ornament known as truth, drove his chariot fast, while his mind travelled faster.* Managing to make the speed of his chariot match the speed of his mind, Bharata finally reached the big gateway of Ayōdhya. At the entrance he did not see the usual cluster of long creepers which in former days rose up to the sky as if to plead with the sun, "You are tired going round the world; please stay here and refresh yourself." He did not hear the sound of drums inviting people to come and receive whatever they wanted. Bharata could see neither singers who sang in praise of the king and took liberal presents of elephant calves and vast wealth, nor brahmins receiving costly gifts, like horses and cows.

In Ayōdhya, the bees had stopped humming; the stringed instrument yāzh had ceased to produce music of seven notes; chariots, horses, elephants, palanquins and carts had stopped moving in the streets, which consequently lost their beauty like sandy dry rivers. Bharata, adored even by elders, looked at the charmless state of Ayōdhya and told Satrughna, "Is this the prosperous capital inhabited by the Emperor? What could be the reason for this woeful condition, making it like the abode of enemies? Look at the city resembling the ocean of milk deserted by the Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Vishnu." The leonine Satrughna bowed to Bharata and replied," The calamity that has overtaken the city does not seem to be an ordinary one. It appears as though the goddess of wealth has deserted this great city which should have remained prosperous till pralaya." Bharata rushed to the tall sacred gateway of his father's palace. Eager to see his father, the tall-shouldered Bharata went in but could not find him anywhere. Realising that the king's absence from his palace was no ordinary event, Bharata became alarmed. Then he saw the impeccable Kausalya, mother of Rāma. When Bharata was about to bow to her, a companion of Kaikeyi told him that he was wanted by the latter. Immediately, Bharata went to his mother,

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Kaikeyi, and prostrated himself at her feet. She embraced him and enquired whether her father and other relatives at Kekaya were all right. Bharata replied in the affirmative. With folded hands Bharata told his mother, "I wish to pay my respects to the Emperor because of my overflowing love for him. Tell me where he is." Without a trace of grief, Kaikeyi replied, "Emperor Dasaratha, who destroyed the Asuras and protected the world, has reached heaven, with the Devas offering him salutations. Do not grieve." As soon as Bharata heard those cruel words which were like a spear thrust into his heart, he fell senseless like a giant tree uprooted by furious thunder and flung to the ground. Regaining consciousness after a while, Bharata with a lustreless face shed profuse tears which flowed like a stream from his lotus eyes. Facing his mother, he asked, "Will anyone other than you think of uttering those cruel words which burn my ears like fire?" The cloud-complexioned Bharata got up from the floor, wept for his father, sobbed and fell again.

He wailed aloud and said, "O father, by dying, have you not uprooted dharma, destroyed compassion (your shining wealth) and forgotten justice? Can there be a greater blame on you? O charitable king who can destroy the enemy known as anger! You who can extinguish the fire of lust with its attendant evils and please everyone! Is it dharma on your part to have chosen a life that will bring you eternal bliss in the next birth, ignoring your present duties? O lord who restored the greatness of the Solar dynasty! How were you able to leave Rāma who destroyed the might of the mountain-like bow of Lord Siva? O lord who wielded the sceptre in an upright manner! In this world, irrespective of their paths, all came to you for help. Are there such poor people in heaven, too? O Emperor with victorious shoulders! Have you gone in pursuit of the cool shade of the sacred and fragrant karpaga tree, leaving the people whom the shade of your royal white umbrella helped and sheltered for ages, in sorrow? O lord, are Asuras like Campara still there in the celestial world? Have the frightened Devas lost their abodes and fallen at your feet seeking your protection? Have you gone to heaven only to protect them? You had done yāgas after vanquishing your enemy kings possessing mighty armies. Do you prefer to stay in heaven, instead of performing these yāgas here? Did you go out of this world because Rāma is without a sceptre in his hand? So that you could hand over the ever-obedient sceptre, from your beautiful hands to him? But then, it appears to me that you were not destined to witness the auspicious event of the installation of your victorious crown over the head of your beloved Rāma whom you obtained after great penance."

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Unable to bear his sorrow, Bharata was in acute agony with tears in his eyes. Partially consoling himself, he said, "Now, Rāma alone possessing boundless qualities of head and heart is my father, mother, elder brother and lord. Until I pay homage to his divine feet, this cruel agony will not leave me." The moment Bharata spoke these words, Kaikeyi, who could utter thunder-like harsh words, said, "O holder of a lethal bow! Rāma is now in the forest with his brother, Lakshmana, and wife, Seeta." On hearing Kaikeyi's words, Bharata suffered as if he had devoured fire. He said, "What further misfortune is there in store for me because of my sins? What more agonising news have I to hear?" Weeping in despair, Bharata asked, "What prompted Rāma with a hero's anklets and lotus feet to go to the forest? Is it on account of any harm done by him, or because of the wrath of the gods, or invulnerable mighty destiny, or for any other reason? Even if Rāma had done something wrong, the people of this world would only take it as something done by a mother for the good of her child! Did Rāma go to the forest before the death of my father, Dasaratha, or after? Please tell me." Kaikeyi replied, "Rāma did not go to the forest for the crime of insulting preceptors, or for any arrogant act, or even due to the wrath of any god. Rāma went to the forest even when the flawless Dasaratha was quite alive." Bharata asked Kaikeyi, "If Rāma had not done anything wrong, nor made anyone angry, nor committed any crime to attract the wrath of the gods, what made him go to the forest even when our father was alive? Explain clearly." Kaikeyi said, "I forced the king to give me the two boons he had once promised me. Through one of them I got Rāma exiled to the forest and through the other, I secured the kingdom for you. Unable to bear separation from his son, Dasaratha gave up his life."

Bharata's lotus hands which were folded over his head to pay homage to Kaikeyi, closed his ears before her cruel words could reach them. His eyebrows arched and went up and down. His deep sighs brought forth flames of fire and his eyes shed blood. His cheeks palpitated. Sparks of fire along with smoke appeared from the pores of his skin. His tongue got stuck and his long hands clashed with each other raising a great sound, which frightened even the clouds and rent the earth. When Bharata kicked the earth with all his might in utter fury, this world and the Meru mountain were in distress, like a ship (carrying elephants) attacked by a wild storm in the midst of a vast sea. The Devas were frightened by his fury; the Asuras dropped dead from fear; the sun set; and the ferocious Yama shut his eyes. Furious, leonine Bharata wanted to slay Kaikeyi though she was his mother. But, if he were to do it, he would

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have to face the wrath of Rāma. So he desisted. Instead, he began abusing her thunderously with harsh words, and said, "Because of your cruel intrigue, my father died, and my elder brother has gone to the forest to do penance. On hearing this if I have not torn your mouth, will it not amount to my agreeing to rule the kingdom which you have secured for me out of greed? Even after committing two cruel deeds, you are alive and I stand here without slaying you. I have not even hit you the moment you opened your mouth. It is only because I am afraid that my mother-like Rāma will be angry with me; and not because you happen to be my mother! *For your cruelty, there was a king to die; there was a hero to abdicate the kingdom and go to the forest; there is still one Bharata to rule this land which you aspired for and got!* In these circumstances, the path of dharma is blemishless indeed! Is it not? Can there be a better manner of earning the accusation that in olden days there was a Bharata who, supported by a scheming mother, destroyed an age-old tradition and brought discredit to the Solar dynasty?

"You have consumed the life of your husband. You are not a disease but a fiend. How can a cruel person like you still be alive? Go and die. Giving me milk when I was a child, you have given me everlasting blame now. I wonder what further blemish you are going to bring for me! Exercising your boon, you have killed the king who never uttered a falsehood, and earned an unending curse for yourself. After obtaining the kingdom, you wanted to live happily for ever. Even after seeing the agony of the people of this land when Rāma left for the forest (like the agony of cows separated from their calves), you have not given up your wild and cruel thoughts. In taking care that no damage was done to the boon granted by him, my father gave up his life. This noble Dasaratha's son, Rāma, felt that to act according to the commands of his father alone was dharma and therefore gave up his right to rule this great land. Can I afford to face the charge levelled by the people of the world, that 'Bharata who was born along with Rāma, managed to acquire the right to rule the land through his scheming mother?' *Rāma, who had the right to sovereignty, did not think for a moment that if he were to go to the forest our father would die. Rāma, however, thought that the granting of the boon to Kaikeyi happened because of me. When he thought of me, Rāma felt strongly that I would rule the entire country and so he left for the forest.* If he had not thought thus, would he not have remained here for the good of the people? Whatever be the view of the universally extolled Dasaratha, after he had granted the

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boon, this kingdom acquired for me by my mother Kaikeyi will make Rāma conclude, 'My brother, Bharata, who was always at my service, had evil designs'.

"Cruel Bharata is still alive. My brother Rāma uses his hand as a plate for eating food prepared out of leaves, while I use a golden plate and eat white rice mixed with ghee! Will not my countrymen think of me as a disgraceful person? On hearing that Rāma had gone to the fierce forest, the good Dasaratha gave up his life the same day. I have neither killed venomous Kaikeyi, nor have I given up my life. Without trying to reduce the degree of my blemish, I, too, weep like those who have great love for Rāma! People will never approve of my ruling the kingdom, nor can I stoop to bear the blame and still survive. I cannot get rid of this blemish except by my death. Do you not know that in this land where Rāma is absent, Lakshmi will not stay either? From whom did you take advice? Who asked you to do these foul deeds? What have you achieved by uprooting dharma? *I have killed my father and sent the great Rāma to the forest and I am waiting to rule the land; all due to your murderous tongue. But is this what people will think? No. You will not be blamed. I alone will be chastised. There is no way of escaping the blame that would be attributed to me. People will watch with contempt my failure to lay down my life. They will ridicule me not knowing my great love for Rāma. I am certainly not going to accept the kingdom. Even you will therefore be bearing the blame in vain. It is said, 'Unconsumed poison cannot kill'. Only with this thought, do I remain alive.* Because I was conceived and nurtured in your sinful womb and was born from it, I propose to do great penance (which will be witnessed by dharma and also seen by the three worlds) so that I may expiate myself from this curse and be relieved of my agony. If you lay down your life which you have not yet given up, you will be treated as one who had done these cruel deeds out of ignorance and not wilfully. You will be absolved of all sins and become pure, reaping the benefits of being born in this world. There is no other way of getting rid of your guilt. I have offered you this good advice which would come from noble ones." Bharata then declared, "I will no longer stay with this sinner. I will go and prostrate myself at the divine feet of Kausalya."

Leaving Kaikeyi's chamber, Prince Bharata went to Kausalya. He fell down violently, cracking the floor. With his lustrous big hands he held Kausalya's lotus-like tiny feet and lamented loudly, "Where has my father gone? Where is my brother now? Having been left alone all along, have I returned from the land of Kekaya only to

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witness these calamities? Please relieve me of my mental agony." Looking at Bharata, even the Devas in the sky felt sad. Bharata continued, "I have not seen the divine feet of Lord Rāma. Why should Rāma who is to protect this land, leave for the forest? You have not perhaps prevented him from doing so. You have thus become guilty." Rolling on the floor with dust sticking to his shoulders, he wailed, "The entire dynasty (of cruel ones) who indulged in treacherous acts has not yet been annihilated! How can I describe it? Thief as I am, having been born from the womb of the wicked Kaikeyi, I will end my life and be rid of my agony. The age-old dynasty which shone brightly, beginning with the sun the remover of darkness, now has a blemish known as 'Bharata'. What a pity! With Dasaratha reaching heaven and with his eldest son, Rāma, going to the forest, this land of Kōsala which has lost its eyes has to suffer from misery." Kausalya, possessing extreme patience and unique chastity, saw the agony of the lamenting Bharata. She realised that he would not accept the kingdom and his heart was pure. She cast off her misgivings that he was an accomplice in Kaikeyi's plot. With a depressed mind, Kausalya felt that Bharata was honest and faultless. She said, "Perhaps you were not aware of Kaikeyi's plot."

Hearing Kausalya's words, Bharata who had fallen at her divine feet, roared like a captive lion and wept. Making even the goddess of dharma shiver, he took an oath, "If Kaikeyi's evil designs were already known to me, let me go to the hell to which evil-doers who have tried to wipe out the righteous deeds of others, who have no merciful hearts, who have stayed at the gates of others waiting to molest their wives, who have shown wrath against others, who have destroyed stable and steady lives, and who have caused great harm to ascetics, are sent. Let me go to the hell assigned for one who kills the *great five* (king, preceptor, father, mother and brother) and women; the hell assigned for one who enters the battlefield with his king and runs away afraid of losing his life; and the hell assigned for those who snatch and take possession of the alms collected by beggars. Let me go to the hell meant for those who assert that Lord Tirumāl is no God at all; who harm sages who never strayed from the righteous path; and who, instead of fostering the faultless scriptures, declare that they were all blatant lies. Let me go to the hell assigned for one who fills his accursed stomach with food while his mother, who has given birth to him, is about to die of starvation; one who deserts his dying leader in the battlefield and runs away; one who out of fear forsakes those who seek his protection; and one who always gives up dharma.

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"If it is a fact that I was aware of Kaikeyi's treacherous plot, let me fall into the fierce and hot hell into which one who gives false evidence, one who runs away from the battle-field out of fear, one who takes away for himself anything given for safe keeping, and one who harasses those who are already in distress falls. Let me be cast away into the hell meant for one who burns the houses of sages, one who kills youngsters, one who utters lies in courts of justice, and one who contemptuously condemns the gods. Let me be thrown into the hell meant for a person who consumes all the milk from the udder of the mother cow leaving the calf to die, a person who steals public property, and a person who forgetting the timely help rendered speaks ill of the benefactor instead of expressing gratitude. Let me be cast into the hell meant for one who runs away to save his life without saving his co-passengers when threatened by highway robbers, and one who consumes food without removing the hunger of those who suffer from starvation."

After lashing out several words, Bharata continued, "O mother, please listen to me. If I have aspired for the kingdom secured by the machinations of Kaikeyi who gave birth to me, let me go to all the hells." Bharata fell again at Kausalya's cool, divine, lotus feet, and continued with his assertions. He said, "Let me immediately go to the hell to which the accursed ones, like those who surrender in a battlefield where war-weapons clash, and the king who usurps wealth from his subjects would be forced to go. Let me be reduced to the stature of the king, who, having acquired a flawless kingdom, gradually ignores the age–old righteous acts prescribed for him and steadily indulges in wicked deeds, and the cowardly king who allows the enemy king to wear the garland of victory by taking to his heels without a fight. Let me go to the hell to which one who thinks of outraging the modesty of a virgin, one who looks at the preceptor's wife with lust, a drunkard who amasses wealth in a stealthy manner, one who like a cur eats improper food, one who does not feel ashamed when people say that he is neither a man nor a woman, one who does not care for the good advice of the learned, one who wantonly spreads imaginary canards against flawless ancient ancestors, one who knocks down the food of the poor in times of famine, and one who eats the most delicious food all alone when others are waiting for the same with their mouths watering, is sent. If I was an accomplice in the evil designs of Kaikeyi, let me attain the humiliating state of those who have wasted their might and masculinity in despicable activities and stayed as captives to protect their bodies for some time, in enemy camps, shamelessly eating the food provided by them. Let me be drawn to the

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hell meant for one who neither gives what he possesses to those who seek it from him, nor says 'no' to them, but keeps on dodging them wasting their time. Let me be condemned to hold my head down and pay homage even to the cowardly warrior, who, after going to the front with a sword, falls ill out of fear and wants to save his stinking body! Let me become like the shameless person, who, with his legs bound by iron fetters, stands disgracefully — only for the sake of retaining his life — before the enemy who enjoys the fertile land usurped by him.

Kausalya, on hearing the assertions of Bharata which proved the puriy of his mind, felt immensely happy. She felt as if Rāma who had gone to the wild forest had come back. She embraced Bharata with great affection. Realising what a sterling character he possessed, and how evil Kaikeyi's deeds were, Kausalya stood crying with milk flowing from her swollen breasts. Again and again she thought of the noble qualities of Bharata. With a tender heart, she extolled him and said, "O king of kings, who is there as great as you are in this age-old dynasty of yours? O flawless son, seven days have elapsed since your munificent father passed away. Please perform the last rites due to him by his sons." Bōwing to Kausalya who had affectionately directed him thus, Bharata accompanied by Vasishta, *saw the body of Dasaratha (the embodiment of ancient dharma) who had given up his life to protect the life of dharma.* He fell onto the floor, wept bitterly and bathed the beautiful, golden oil-soaked body of his father with his tears. Brahmins well-versed in all the four Védas stood around holding the body of Dasaratha and took it out from the well of oil. While the royal drums, thundered, they placed the body in a golden chariot specially made for the purpose. Along with Sumantira, came the council of ministers including military heads, friends and others. They all surrounded the body and wept. The citizens who had gathered in vast numbers like a sea, lifted their hands in reverence, wept bitterly, cried aloud and stood trembling. The large number of kings assembled there, paid their last respects and wept. The chariot which bore the body of Dasaratha was then placed on an elephant which had a rope fastened to its neck and taken out in procession.

Everywhere, conches, long horns and drums produced the same piteous tunes of death as the wailing women of Ayōdhya. With the cavalry, the army of elephants, the contingent of chariots, kings and Védic brahmins marching in front, and with the queens of Dasaratha coming behind, the elephant carrying the chariot was conducted towards the Sarayu River. On the river bank, all the rituals were completed under the direction of Védic scholars. The funeral pyre was got ready. The body of Dasaratha

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was placed on it amidst great sorrow. The priests called upon Bharata to light the funeral pyre. *As he rose to do so, Vasishtha intervened and said, "O Bharata! you are the cause of the destruction of an ancient tradition! Out of anguish caused by the cruel deed of your mother, Dasaratha died only after disowning you!" Bharata was no longer his father's son! He felt as if he were dead. "Good, good!" he said with painful sarcasm, and fell on the ground like a snake frightened by thunder.*

Suffering from uncontrollable agony and sobbing bitterly, Bharata said, *"How strange it is that though I am not qualified to perform the last rites of my deceased father, I have acquired the right to rule the kingdom. Who is there in my great Solar dynasty to surpass me?* Its flawless kings right from Kasyapa, the son of Brahma, became Devas as a reward for having adhered to justice and dharma. Though I am a scion of this renowned dynasty, I have become as worthless as the seed of a wayside plant. How graceful is the help rendered to me by my mother who bore me and brought me up 'so well'!" Bharata spoke in great grief and mental agony. Vasishtha then conducted the funeral rites of Dasaratha with the help of the younger brother, Satrughna. After the last rites were completed by Satrughna and after all the connected ceremonies were over, Bharata, who considered his regal mantle as something acquired through sinful means bringing for him an ocean of misery, returned to the palace. The subsequent rites lasted for ten days. To Bharata, those ten days seemed a yuga (eon) and he was immersed in a sea of grief. During that period, Satrughna performed all the ceremonies for his deceased father in accordance with the directions of brahmins well-versed in the ancient books on dharma. After completing all the rites, and assisting in the granting of gifts to those deserving them, Sage Vasishtha accompanied by a vast concourse of brahmins who had specialised in the three Védas (Rig, Sāma and Yajur) came to the mighty Bharata to tell him of the future course of action. All senior ministers realised with clarity that it would not be in the interest of the country to be without a king. *They felt that in a land without a king, many hardships and misdeeds were bound to occur; and to avoid the same, these ministers accompanied by scholars went to see Bharata.*

11. ONWARD JOURNEY

Learning that the prince was with Vasishtha (the master of scriptures) in the royal assembly, knowledgeable ministers, citizens, generals of the army, kings and scholars

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joined and surrounded the handsome Bharata. Amidst such an elite gathering, Sumantira, the great charioteer with exalted knowledge, looked at the omniscient Vasishtha, expecting the sage to ask Bharata to rule the kingdom. Understanding Sumantira's mind through his very eyes, Vasishtha told Bharata, "O flawless one! The purpose for which these sages, elders and kings have come to you is to ask you to bear in mind that in the absence of a king, justice and dharma will suffer considerably; and to protect these, a king is necessary. You are also aware that everyone should be given the benefits of the incomparable substance known as dharma which needs to be stabilised. By taking up the reins of the kingdom now, you will bring good in this birth as well as the next. This dharma is actually practised by those with clear thinking. A kingdom without a strong king possessing an army, is like the day without the sun, or the night unaccompanied by stars and the moon, or the body without life. Neither in the celestial world, nor in the world of fiends nor in any other place, do we see a kingdom without a king to protect it. Nowhere on earth or in the celestial region, among objects (static or moving) created by Lord Brahma, do we find the absence of leadership. So far, this world was guarded by renowned kings of your dynasty who were extolled by the pious including the lotus-born Lord Brahma. If you now refuse to rule this land, it will be destroyed like an unprotected boat in a tidal sea. O my son, your father is dead. Your elder brother, Rāma, has left this land and gone to the forest. Through the boon received by your mother Kaikeyi, this unique kingdom with endless fame is now yours. Please accept it and protect it."

To Bharata, asking him to accept and protect this world, was like asking him to consume poison. He trembled. He shed tears which flowed like a stream. With a mind that was perturbed, with words that faltered, with eyes that were sunken, and with the heart of a lamenting woman, Bharata swooned and then regained consciousness. He told all who had gathered in the royal assembly, "What a shame that even the learned should say that it is my right to be crowned when the unique leader of the three worlds, born before me, is alive. If this is acceptable, how can Kaikeyi be faulted for what she has done? If Vasishtha can say that the younger brother be crowned even when the elder brother is alive and that such an act is in conformity with dharma, my mother's action, too, cannot be wrong. O great sage, you are well-known for your noble character. If you declare that my mother's action is right, then I am afraid the present period is the evil one of Kaliyuga, bypassing the Tréta and Dwāpara yugas. I beseech all of you in this royal assembly to let me know whether there has been a

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single instance, even from the time of Brahma, where a younger brother was crowned when the elder brother was alive. *Even if all of you prove that it is just and proper for me to accept the kingdom, I will certainly not live to bear the burden of protecting the lives of this world. Instead, I will bring Rāma from the forest and adorn him with the great crown decorated with flowers according to ancient customs. If I am not able to bring Rāma back and crown him, I will stay with him in the forest and happily undertake great penance. If you say one word more, I will give up my life."* Listening to Bharata, those who were in the assembly blessed him and said, "Rāma agreed to be adorned with the gem-studded crown even when Dasaratha was alive; whereas even after his death, you have rejected the kingdom offered to you. Who is there as great as you among the princes? Is there any need for you to add to your glory by wielding the revolving sceptre, or protecting dharma, or performing yāgas? *Even if the fourteen worlds are destroyed, your fame will live on."*

Bharata asked his brother, Satrughna, to arrange for the beating of thunderous drums and proclaim, "As per the custom followed by this land, Rāma should have become the king. He will be brought back by us." Bharata also asked Satrughna to direct the army to get ready. When Satrughna announced the words of gracious Bharata, the great city of Ayōdhya steeped in agony because of its love for Rāma, raised an ecstatic roar, like a lifeless body coming back to life by consuming the nectar of immortality. On hearing that Rāma would be adorned with the golden crown, all beings on earth including great sages, became extremely happy. The news, divine in nature, was a boon to everyone. The announcement, "Bharata is bringing back his elder brother, Rāma, to this great city," was received by the famous city of Ayōdhya, with an ecstasy akin to the ecstasy of the sea during moonrise. Like the seven seas swelling during pralaya, the vast army of Bharata rose from Ayōdhya with a great clamour. *As the rising army proceeded in advance, the aspirations of Kaikeyi stood demolished; at the same time, because of the surging of their love towards Rāma, the agony of the people of Ayōdhya was mitigated.*

Decorated elephants, chariots, horses and carts, filled the earth without a gap. Long and big flags screened the sky. A huge column of dust, rising upwards from the ground as the large army marched, made it impossible even to visualise the heavenly Lord Brahma. There was loud noise everywhere, exceeding the noise heard when Lord Siva destroyed the whole world. *The army was greater in size than even the hopes*

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raised in the minds of one and all that they would soon be seeing the flawless Rāma. Male elephants belonging to the army walked along with female elephants, like the cloud-complexioned Rāma leaving Ayōdhya and walking towards the forest along with creeper-like Seeta. Vanquished by women (whose feet were dantier than lotus flowers), herds of young female elephants carried them on their backs. Innumerable kings rode on elephants. While the sea-like contingent of chariots and elephants marched forward, the black sea of cavalry with beautiful horses and the sea-like infantry followed.

Trumpets, conches, cymbals, bugles and drums remained silent, like scholars in the midst of fools. Women who in disgust had removed all their ornaments, except flawless natural ornaments like shyness and other noble feminine qualities, appeared charming and graceful even without those artificial ornaments, making the Devas wonder whether these women belonged to the celestial world. The unique big royal white umbrellas which used to be opened traditionally over the emperors who had protected the world, remained shut in the company of various small royal white umbrellas belonging to other kings, like a starry night without the moon. There was no space in all the eight directions to accommodate the vast concourse. *Yet the earth bore this burden, making one wonder whether the person who said, 'The earth draped by the sea is a damsel', ever spoke the truth!* In the entourage of Bharata, the mighty shoulders of men shone like mountains devoid of tender creepers and shrubs, as they were no longer hidden by fragrant flower garlands, or by the sandalwood paste from the breasts of their loving wives. Women whose flowing hair ceased to be exposed to the fragrant smoke of aquila, suspended their daily routine of beautifying themselves. Their eyes without black collyrium, looked like deadly véls cleansed of blood stains caused by victorious warriors. Like chariots without the jingle of the small bells fitted to them, the waists of women were devoid of the clink of jewelled girdles. Like lotus flowers without the hum of the bees, the coral-like, red, small feet of women were devoid of the tinkle of anklets. *The fragile waists of women in a way got some respite, without having to carry the load of pearl chains. It appeared as if the cruel boon granted to the daughter of Kekaya, had favoured only the slender waists of women!*

The vast army of Bharata, devoid of happiness, made everyone feel that Goddess Lakshmi (Seeta) had left the lotus flower (Ayōdhya) to do penance. While none could say whether the army of Bharata was as big as the rising pralaya sea, one could,

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however, assert that it was bigger than Lord Brahma's eyes and mind. Having consumed in full the waters of big rivers with waves, having stabilised the earth in a proper position by pressing the tall hills, the mighty army of Bharata resembled *Sage Agastya* the great Tamil seer, who had once drunk the entire sea and had pressed the Vindhya mountains into the earth. With the departure of Seeta, men of wisdom, the army and youths, the deserted city of Ayōdhya looked like a vast dry sea. The difficult terrain (interspersed with tidal rivers, shade-giving trees, and hills) through which the army marched, was like divine Ayōdhya's crowded streets through which it was difficult to walk! The men of Bharata's army were in agony because of the departure of Rāma. Consequently, the fragrance of flower garlands, or the fragrance of sandalwood paste smeared over their bosoms, or any other fine scent, was absent. *In that army which was larger than the sea traversed by catamarans, only the waists of women with lustrous foreheads flashed like lightning, while there was no glitter from ornaments like ear-rings.* Drums and other musical instruments retained only their names without producing any sound. The huge army appeared only like a picture drawn on a big wall. Rāma's departure to the forest acted as a shield, protecting men from the disease of lust brought on by the darting looks of captivating women. The thoughts of such men, which earlier used to succumb to the five fierce arrows of Manmatha before, now merely strayed over the breasts of women. They were afraid that they would be burnt by the breasts of these women with the fire of the wrath they nursed for Kaikeyi! *In the midst of such an army, bark-clad Bharata boarding a beautiful big chariot along with his younger brother, Satrughna, proceeded towards the forest in great mental agony.*

Bharata, accompanied by his mothers, sages who had done great penance, his father's able ministers, countless relatives and pious brahmins, reached the gateway of that big city of Ayōdhya. Mantarai the Yama, pushing everyone and making her way through that crowd, was spotted by Satrughna. He ran angrily to catch hold of her and throw her into the sky. Bharata stopped him and said, "I would have got rid of my fury by cutting my sinful mother into several bits. I have not done so, even though I do not consider her as my mother, because Rāma would then cast me away. *If we exhibit our anger even against Kooni who has caused endless agony to all, Rāma would be furious with us. You had better leave her alone." Satrughna became quiet and went along with Bharata.* Surrounded by the vast army consisting of divisions of elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry, Bharata reached and stayed in the same grove that Rāma, Seeta

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and Lakshmana had stayed in. Bathing in the stream of tears flooding his big eyes, Bharata ate only the roots and fruits available in the mountains. He rested on the same dusty grass-bed where Rāma had rested. Learning that Rāma had gone from that place on foot, Bharata also followed suit, with rolling chariots, speeding horses and beautiful elephants *following* him.

12. CROSSING THE GANGA

Bharata left the fertile land of Kōsala — comparable only to the land of Chola enriched by the River Kāveri — and reached the River Ganga. Into the water of the sacred river, the rutting fluid from the furious elephants flowed, making the water unfit for the vast multitude of people to drink or bathe in. The horses in the cavalry sighed, drank the water, swam, and then rolled on the ground raising columns of dust. As soon as Guhan saw the huge army reach the banks of the Ganga, he became furious. He thought that the mighty army had come to fight with lord Rāma. He laughed loudly, with sparks of fire coming from his eyes and smoke coming from his nostrils! With an army consisting of five hundred thousand robust warriors, Guhan, holding a trident in his hands, looked as ferocious as Yama. Using harsh words and biting his lips, with a sword tied to his waist, his bow raised and a bugle in his hands, he stood ready to fight. With great fury he declared, "I will consume Bharata's men, like a deadly snake devouring rats." In a loud voice he called upon his army to rally round him like tigers with mighty sharp claws gathering in one place. He told the fellow–hunters surrounding him that he wanted to send Bharata's army to heaven and restore the Kōsala empire to his dear Rāma, and solicited their approval. He directed his fellow–hunters to beat the drums and destroy the pathways on land and water. He asked them not to row the boats and ordered them to behead those who had gathered on the banks of the fragrant Ganga.

Guhan said aloud, "King Bharata, who deceitfully prevented my beloved Rāma from taking over the kingdom, has now arrived. Will my furious crimson arrows emitting fire not attack him? If he escapes from them and remains alive, will not people humiliate me by calling me a cur? Can this Bharata cross the long and deep River Ganga full of waves without any help? Am I an archer who would run away in fear seeing the huge army of elephants? *What a great honour Rāma did me when he took me as his friend!* If I, a poor hunter, do not strive to deserve that honour, will not people scoff at me and want me to die? This Bharata does not realise that Rāma is his elder brother, nor does he seem to

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know that Rāma has a strong tiger-like younger brother (Lakshmana). These apart, why should Bharata insult me? Does he not have to cross this boundary? Does he think that the arrows of hunters do not pierce the hearts of kings? *Do these kings who rule the land not know how to discriminate between good and evil, between friend and foe, and between acts which bring joy and acts which bring sorrow?* Only after my life and the lives of my men are taken away can Bharata think of attacking my bosom friend. When my Rāma is doing penance in the forest, can that Bharata rule the land? After all, life is no nectar for me. If need be, will I not oppose Bharata for the sake of Rāma and die famous? It is good that I stayed back and did not go with Rāma who offered me true friendship. I will discharge my duty this very day. Bharata's mighty army can help him only after crossing the Ganga. O furious hunters, do not row the boats. Let us lay down our lives for Rāma. Fie on Bharata's army which is not sufficient for our warriors as food for a single meal! Even if the Devas were to oppose me, my cloud-like bow would shower a rain of arrows and pierce the bowels of the foes, destroy all the elephants and annihilate the rest of the army holding swords. On the day of the coronation, Kaikeyi gave my beloved and generous Rāma bark clothing to wear around his waist. I shall kill the army of her son, Bharata, with my arrows. Will not these corpses with their flesh and blood be dragged by Ganga and dumped into the sea? *Will you not, my dear hunters gathered here, be proud to attain fame by destroying Bharata's army and restoring the kingdom to your great Lord Rāma, the very embodiment of dharma? Look at this Bharata who is not willing to give even our forest to Rāma who gave his kingdom to him! If I fight with Bharata regardless of Rāma's anger, what will happen to Bharata's army? Even if Bharata's forces are as large as the seven seas, they will be annihilated like tender crops eaten up by cows."*

As Guhan was speaking to his hunters, Sumantira the expert charioteer who saw him from the northern bank of Ganga, approached Bharata and told him, "The person who stands before us on the opposite bank owns both the banks of Ganga and has a number of boats with him. He is Guhan, a bosom friend of our Rāma. He has broad shoulders, wears garlands, is as virile as a rutting elephant and possesses an ocean-like army of archers. This Guhan, with a beautiful cloud-like complexion, is as mighty as a rock and (possessing boundless affection for Rāma and Lakshmana) stands before us with a desire to meet you." Bharata of flawless mind heard Sumantira speak about all the qualities of Guhan with pleasure and replied, "As Guhan is a close friend of our Rāma, let me go to him before he comes to me." Along with Satrughna, Bharata started moving towards the river, with his mind full of affection for Rāma. Guhan saw Bharata moving like a big

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mountain towards the river bank and was shocked to find him clad in bark with his body covered with dust. Bharata's face looked like the faded moon without brightness, exhibiting great suffering which would melt even stones. Guhan lost his grip on his bow. It slipped to the ground. He said to himself, "Bharata who is indeed great among men resembles my Rāma. Satrughna standing nearby resembles Lakshmana. Just like Rāma, Bharata, too, wears the attire of ascetics. He bows towards the southern direction where Rāma stays. Can the brothers of Lord Rāma ever do wrong?" Looking at the hunters standing near him, Guhan said, "This Bharata is afflicted with great sorrow. He seems to have abundant love for Rāma. Let me go and find out what is in his mind. Till then take care of this place." Speaking thus, Guhan proceeded in a boat to meet Bharata.

On reaching the opposite bank, Guhan paid obeisance to Bharata who was himself bowing in the direction of Rāma. Bharata who had attained the heights of glory that made even Lord Brahma salute him, bowed to Guhan. On seeing this, Guhan embraced Bharata in ecstasy like a father embracing a son and asked him what had brought him there. Bharata replied, "My father Dasaratha, who had once guarded the entire world, handed over his kingdom to me. He thereby failed to uphold the tradition of his ancestors. To remove that blemish, I have come here to take Rāma back to Ayōdhya." Truthful Guhan heard what Bharata said, and sighed deeply for the wrong conclusions he had come to earlier. He caught Bharata's feet and said, "O famous Bharata! Paying heed to the words of your mother, Kaikeyi, your father Dasaratha granted the kingdom to you. Like one who rejects sin, you discarded the kingdom and have come here with a sorrowful mind. *With all the laudable qualities you have, can one thousand Rāmas equal you?* O noble lord with mighty shoulders, how can I, an ordinary hunter, adequately extol your greatness? Just as the sun overshadows the bright light of the moon, your fame will overshadow the fame of your ancestors." Commending Bharata with words like these, Guhan showered on him the same love that he had showered on Rāma.

Bharata who followed dharma was like the graceful ocean. He bowed with folded hands towards the southern direction where Rāma was stationed. Asked to be shown the exact place where Rāma had rested, Guhan requested Bharata to accompany him, pointed to a bed of grass lying between two stones and said, "This is where Rāma slept for the night." Bharata trembled, fell on the ground and wept. Bathing Mother Earth with tears, he drowned himself in a sea of agony. Lamenting with uncontrolled grief, he cried, "O Rāma! I should have died the very moment I heard of all the hardship you

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had to bear because of me. When I learn now that you ate roots and vegetables and slept on the wild grass, should I not die? But I am still alive. Perhaps I only pretend great love for you but in reality want to wear that great crown set with precious gems!" Bharata then asked Guhan, "If Rāma slept here, where did Lakshmana who affectionately followed Rāma like a shadow, spend the night?" Guhan replied, "O possessor of tall shoulders surpassing mountains! When Rāma possessing a complexion surpassing darkness and his wife Seeta were asleep, Lakshmana with a bow in his hand, with tears flowing from his eyes and sighing with a hot breath, kept watch without once blinking his eyes, standing all the time till the break of dawn." After hearing this, Bharata said, "I am the cause of Rāma's sufferings, whereas exhibiting limitless love for him Lakshmana has vowed to remove them. How wonderful is my 'servility' to Rāma though I am another younger brother!" Blaming himself thus, Bharata rested on the dusty earth and spent the entire night there. After dawn, seeking Guhan's help for crossing the River Ganga and reaching the southern bank, Bharata said, "Taking us to Rāma will amount to rescuing us from an ocean of agony."

Guhan immediately directed his fellow-hunters to bring the boats. Accordingly they came with their boats which had shapes as different as Mount Kailas, Mount Meru, and Kubera's chariot. The boats were so many in number that they filled the entire surface of the Ganga. *Transporting passengers from one bank to the other and back, these boats resembled the nature of good and evil deeds, resulting in a person moving to and fro between the celestial and terrestrial worlds.* Guhan told Bharata that the boats had arrived, and sought his direction. Bharata respectfully called Sumantira who was like his father, and requested him to transport the army to the southern bank of Ganga. Sumantira examined the various battalions and made them get into the boats contingentwise. Batches of horses, elephants and infantry, got into the boats and were immediately transported to the southern bank of the Ganga. The huge elephants lifted their long trunks above the water and swam across the river like blocks of clouds 'collecting' the entire water from the sea. Parts of chariots like the conical tops, decks, axles, wheels and flags were carried in a set of boats. Just as the souls of the wicked and the virtuous take different bodies after death, different objects were carried by different boats. Eight crores of milk-white, frightened, bridled horses, with long legs capable of moving as fast as wind, were made to get into boats which glided swiftly across the Ganga. In that river (where tidal water flowed like the white upper cloth), war-elephants swam with their heads (raised above the water) looking like Ganga's

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breasts. *The boats transported the jubilant army from the northern bank to the southern bank and returned empty to the starting-point, like clouds entering the sea, collecting water, pouring it as rain, and then doing this all over again. The smoke-like mighty sterns decorated with peacocks' feathers resembled masts of ships. The broad, long river looked like the sky spreading moonlight. The pearls in the water, shone like stars in the sky. The boats looked like the flying chariots of celestial women who flew into the sky after sporting in water. The sturdy oars looked like the legs of the boats which glided along the cool Ganga water as if they were walking on it. The sages flew across the river, like celestials, thereby establishing that there was nothing superior to the power of penance.* The huge army, along with countless persons, reached the southern bank of Ganga leaving the river behind.

Satisfying himself that his entire army had crossed the river full of whirlpools, the victorious Bharata boarded a boat. Along with him stood Kausalya whom even the Devas worshipped. On seeing her, Guhan spontaneously made obeisance to her and asked Bharata who she was. Bharata replied, "She is the eldest and the chief queen of Dasaratha. She is the mother of Rāma, who, as Lord Tirumāl, created Lord Brahma, who in turn created the three worlds. Because she gave birth to Rāma — a rare and unique achievement — she is in possession of the rarest of wealth. She is a great woman who now stands deprived of all that, owing to my birth." Guhan prostrated himself at the divine feet of Kausalya who was like a cow separated from her calf. Pointing to Guhan, Kausalya asked Bharata who he was. Bharata replied, "This person with rock-like shoulders is a gem among men. He is older than Lakshmana, Satrughna and me. He is Rāma's close friend." *Kausalya said, "My dear sons, you need no longer suffer from great sorrow. The departure of Rāma and Lakshmana to the forest has also brought forth something good. It has enabled you to secure the friendship of mountain-like Guhan. Along with him who can fight like a mighty elephant, all five of you should, like one person, protect this vast land for a very long time."* On seeing Sumitra the very embodiment of dharma and compassion standing near Kausalya, Guhan asked Bharata who she was. Bharata replied, "She is a woman who never departed from the virtuous path and always maintained a life of truth. She is the younger queen of king Dasaratha. She is the proud mother of Lakshmana who is always with Rāma proving that he (Rāma) also has a younger brother!

On seeing Kaikeyi, the woman who was responsible for dispatching her husband to the cremation ground, who immersed her son Bharata in an ocean of agony, who

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made graceful Rāma go to the humid forest and who could measure with her cruel mind the worlds which Lord Tirumāl had once measured with His feet, Guhan asked Bharata who she was. Bharata, a gem among men, replied, "She is the sinful woman who can create innumerable sufferings anew and a woman in whose accursed womb I stayed for long because of which my life has lost its weight and my body has become lifeless. As a result of Rāma's departure to the forest, agony is writ large on the face of everyone except her. *If you still cannot guess who she is, I shall tell you. This is the woman who gave birth to me!"* Even after he heard all this, Guhan treated that merciless woman as his own mother and bowed to her with folded hands. Just then, the boat in which they were travelling, reached the opposite bank of Ganga, like a featherless swan swimming and reaching the shore. The mothers of Bharata got down from the boat and proceeded in a palanquin; but Bharata followed by Guhan, walked the long distance with tears flowing from his eyes. Thereafter, Bharata with his people reached the hermitage of the august Sage Bharadwaja, who, through great boons, was in possession of rare attainments, having relieved himself of all sins. Bharadwaja, along with many venerable ascetics, came out to welcome Bharata.

13. THE CORONATION OF RĀMA'S SANDALS

Bharata made a deep bow to the great Sage Bharadwaja, respecting him like his father. Bharadwaja who resembled Lord Siva, took pity on Bharata, blessed him and offered liberal advice that would bring Bharata boundless good. The sage then asked Bharata, "Instead of wearing the precious crown and ruling the land which came to you, why have you come to this forest with a long tuft wearing an ascetic's garb?" Listening to Bharadwaja, Bharata became immensely angry. He replied, "O sage! It does not befit you to say that I have not done what was expected of me. Born as the younger brother of Rāma, I will never depart from the ancient custom which confers sovereignty only on the eldest son. If my divine Rāma refuses to rule the kingdom, I, too, shall spend fourteen years in the forest with him." The sages assembled there were thrilled. They felt as if they were anointed with cool sandalwood-paste, when they heard the words of Bharata. Sage Bharadwaja took him affectionately into the hermitage. Sage Bharadwaja whose spiritual wealth was great, wanted to feed Bharata and his troops. The very thought of the sage brought the celestial world down to the earth! Bharata's entourage forgot all about their past lives and rejoiced as though they had taken fresh births and belonged to a different world. The women of the celestial world thought that the men of Bharata's army possessed indestructible virtues and

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welcomed them. They showered great love on them and took them to their palaces shining like moonlight. They rubbed fragrant powders on the bodies of the men, and bathed them in the cool waters of celestial Ganga. The celestial women decorated Bharata's men with ornaments of pure gold and fed them with nectarous food fit for Devendra. These women offered suitable hospitality to everyone, including the kings in that army and the bearers of palanquins. The elephants consumed balls of food mixed with honey and red paddy until they became unconscious like the cluster of bees lying intoxicated after consuming the rutting fluid from the temples of the elephants. Teams of horses grazed, to their satisfaction, on green grass which looked like lustrous heaps of emeralds. Thus everyone in Bharata's army enjoyed the type of food consumed by Devendra. *But Bharata ate just roots and vegetables, rested on the ground and spent the night allowing dust to settle on his body.*

The hospitality enjoyed by Bharata's entourage, as well as their nocturnal dreams, came to an end with the exit of the dark night. *Just as the pleasures enjoyed by those who gave up dharma stopped midway, the pleasures enjoyed by the soldiers of the army disappeared at dawn.* They felt as if they had left their heavenly abode and were reborn on earth. In the morning, Bharata's army left the hermitage of Sage Bharadwaja. Crossing many groves and hills, they soon entered a desert. The army marched fast raising columns of dust which screened the sun and reduced the heat. The shade of the royal white umbrellas cooled the hot sandy desert as if it was covered with a canopy of well-spread creepers. With the arrival of Bharata, all dry trees in that desert sprouted tender leaves and became green. The army of the late Dasaratha (who considered character superior to life), treated the harsh desert as a fertile land and reached the Citrakoota mountain.

Thick dust rose upwards and spread everywhere; horses, chariots and furious elephants created a din; and Bharata's men raised a clamour. Lakshmana heard the sound and realised that a huge army was approaching. He rose at once and went to the peak of a tall mountain. From there, he saw Bharata holding a sturdy bow followed by an army which humbled even a vast tidal sea. Convinced that 'greedy' Bharata had come to challenge ascetic Rāma, Lakshmana became furious. He pounded the earth with such force that the mountain peak was crushed! He ran swiftly and told Rāma,

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"Bharata has come with the Ayōdhya army to attack you!" He tucked a sword at his waist and fastened his heroes' anklets. He swung a quiver full of arrows of various types on his back and covered his chest with a shield. Touching Rāma's divine feet, he said, "O Rāma, you are now going to witness the `might' of Bharata (who has lost this world as well the celestial world), the `greatness' of his army and also my uniqueness. You will see several rivers of blood rushing into the sea carrying many dead elephants, damaged chariots and the bowels of warriors who have fallen. O hero, you will see my hot arrows piercing the weapons, the hands, and the protected chests of our enemies. You will see blood flowing from them. *O lord, you will now see fiends dancing to the clang of cymbals, on dead horses and the golden decks of deserted chariots, seizing and dragging the hands of soldiers felled by my arrows.* You will see in a moment how I decimate Bharata's army including the beautiful elephants. I will bring relief to the earth by lightening her burden. You will see devils and demons turning red by swimming in the flow of blood and dancing happily that the world would soon be yours! Elephants with decorated face-plates, galloping horses and warriors with mighty shoulders will all die at my hands. The hot blood flowing from their bodies will mingle with the sea. Attacked by my sharp arrows men will be chopped to death; moving chariots will be destroyed; the swords of the warriors will be cut into pieces; the bows of the archers will be smashed; the legs of mighty elelphants and the heads of horses will be severed and the legs and heads of cavalry men will be sundered from their bodies and scattered all around. You are going to see my sharp arrows made of gold with feathers on either side, flying out, after piercing the bosoms of Bharata and Satrughna, inviting the vultures and other birds flying in the sky to eat the flesh of these two. *O holder of the disc! Because of his over-flowing love for a woman (Kaikeyi) this world has been made a place of suffering by Dasaratha.* Directed by him, Bharata has undertaken to rule this world. You will now see that, under my orders, Bharata will give up this land and rule hell. Kaikeyi, who was happy to see your mother, Kausalya, weeping in agony when you left the kingdom to suffer in the forest, will be made to weep and wail after losing her son, Bharata! I will annihilate his army in a moment with this sturdy arrow and shine victoriously like Lord Siva who destroyed Tripura!"

Rāma listened to the brave utterances of Lakshmana and said, "O Lakshmana! If you think of frightening the fourteen worlds, none can stop you. Is it necessary for me to say

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more about your prowess? Listen to something which I propose to tell you. O possessor of shoulders capable of confronting even stone pillars! Is it possible to count the number of flawless monarchs in our great dynasty? Remember that none among them ever departed from the prescribed code of conduct. Even the scriptures will extol the actions of mighty Bharata! He will never perform a deed opposed to dharma. *You do not realise this truth because of your great attachment for me.* Should you not rightly think that Bharata has come here out of love for me, his elder brother? O possessor of weapons shining like lightning! Does it conform to sense or befit your stature to say that he has come to fight with me, and not to present the kingdom and the four types of armies to me? O possessor of shoulders adorned with ornaments! Is it fair on your part to cast aspersions on Bharata, the lofty god of dharma and the kingpin of the chariot of virtue? He has come here with the sole object of seeing me. You are going to see this soon." Having spoken to Lakshmana thus, Rāma awaited the arrival of Bharata. In the meantime, Bharata directed the armies to fall back, hastened along with Satrughna towards Rāma and bowed to him with raised hands, with a withered body and with eyes bereft of beauty because of incessant weeping. *Bharata was like a painted portrait of extreme agony.* Rāma, who understood everything, scanned Bharata from head to foot and studied him intently. Looking at Lakshmana and pointing to Bharata's appearance, Rāma said, "O possessor of a clamorous bow, see for yourself, the 'belligerent' look of Bharata who has come to fight." Seeing Bharata in an ascetic's attire, Lakshmana at once softened. He was ashamed of the harsh words he had uttered. *The bow in his hand and tears from his eyes fell on the ground. The lustre from his face disappeared.*

If Goddess Lakshmi who aspired to get Rāma as her husband through flawless penance, withered in agony and lost all her splendour (when separated from him), Bharata now looked like her envoy sent to bring Rāma back. Prostrating himself before Rāma and seeing his father in him, Bharata said, "O respected brother, you have ignored the dharma prescribed for kings. You have lost compassion for your subjects. You have also flouted the age-old custom of the eldest one ruling the land." Uttering these words, Bharata became breathless and fell unconscious in front of the flowery feet of Rāma, making one doubt whether he was dead or alive. Shedding tears which flowed on the tuft of Bharata, Rāma the very abode of all virtues, sighed. His heart melted. Like the prime God with abundant grace embracing divine dharma, Rāma lifted Bharata and embraced him. Gazing many times at Bharata in an ascetic's attire,

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Rāma allowed several thoughts to come up in his mind. He then said, "You appear to be immersed in great agony! Is our father, the ruler of the world and the possessor of sturdy shoulders doing well?" When the inscrutable Rāma asked this question, Bharata replied, "O lord, because of the separation from you and the fatal boon of that deceitful Kaikeyi who gave birth to me, our father Dasaratha, after establishing truth in this world, reached the celestial world and is now one among the Devas." Even before the painful words of Bharata entered the ears of Rāma (like a burning spear piercing a wound) his eyes and mind oscillated like a kite. He fell on the ground, losing his senses like a cobra stunned by the sound of thunder. After regaining consciousness, he sighed and became grief-stricken.

Thinking of his dead father, Rāma lamented loudly and said, "O great leader! O eternal lamp! O father of all the subjects of the world! O mother of unique dharma! O abode of grace! My beloved father! Alas, you are dead now! Hereafter, who is there to protect truth as you have done? O wearer of a flower garland, you performed many flawless yāgas, secured the grace of the famous sage, Kalaikottu and gave life to me. Was it for getting rid of your life that you gave birth to me? Is this how you take rest after asking me to bear the burden of ruling this kingdom? Was I born to kill you like Yama and then rule this world? After granting sovereignty to me, is this how you control your five senses and do penance? By accepting the kingdom, which even those who desire everything in life are unwilling to accept, I have become a wretch. I have caused hardship to this world. To look at whose face should I still retain this unreal body and rule? O holder of a lustrous and deadly spear! While you have reached heaven unable to bear the sight of my leaving fertile Kōsala and coming to the fierce forest, I am still alive. O possessor of the royal white umbrella that gave cool shade not only to your subjects but even to the full moon! Have you gone to the other world taking with you your great munificence, your dignity, your indestructible strength, your dharma and your truthful nature?"

The leonine Rāma wept bitterly, immersed in deep sorrow. The kings who had arrived, and his three younger brothers with their long hands, lifted him and embraced him trying to console him. Seeing his state, Sage Vasishtha attempted to assuage his grief with soothing words. Soon, several great sages, including Bharadwaja, and all the kings in the seven worlds, their ministers and generals arrived and surrounded Rāma.

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Looking at Rāma's face full of grief, Vasishtha, the great son of Brahma said, "O Rāma, for all stable lives intermingled with the body, there is nothing that can help excepting the ascetic way of life and a pure life! Having seen the boundaries of the Védas, how can you forget that it is but natural for a person to die and be reborn? For all lives, the number of births is countless. Knowing that these births have their joy and sorrow, can you expect any mercy from cruel Yama? You have seen instances where the life of a child ends in the womb itself; whereas, your father ruled the entire world for sixty thousand years in a righteous and flawless manner. Does it therefore befit you to lament over his death?

"You must know that even Lord Siva holding the trident and doing His duty of *destruction*, Lord Tirumāl (Mahāvishnu) holding the disc and doing His duty of *protection*, and Lord Brahma doing His duty of *creation* — the three of whom are the Supreme Trinity of Gods for all living beings in the world — cannot escape from the dragnet of 'Time'. *Earth, water, fire, wind and sky are the five elements which can be easily understood by the five senses with the help of the five organs starting with the eye. These five elements have limitless dimensions and are the very substance from which everything in the world is created. Even these five elements are bound to be destroyed one day or the other.* Is it then wise on your part to suffer from grief over the loss of the life of your father? Life is after all like a lamp into which the fragrant ghee, *punyam* (the result of virtuous deeds), is poured, a strong wick, *time*, is kept, and the fire, *fate*, is lit. If the ghee (punyam) and the wick (time) are exhausted, the lamp (life) undoubtedly gets extinguished. Innumerable are the births of persons drowned in grief in this world, suffering in hell and again indulging in vices in the next birth. Can they ever be counted? Whereas Dasaratha, only because he happened to be your father, has attained Vishnuloka the heavenly abode of Mahāvishnu, which even Brahma the Supreme Lord cannot attain. Do not suffer from grief any longer. There is no worthier path for your father than the one through which he has reached his exalted position. You have to now perform his last rites according to prescribed procedures. *Remember that the human body is perishable like the ephemeral bubbles seen in the water coming from the sky. It is senseless to lament continuously over such a body.* There is nothing that you gain by your weeping. Therefore, go and perform the water rites for your father." Along with Sage Vasishtha, Rāma went to the Ganga.

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Following the advice of the sage, Rāma started performing the rites. He went into the river and bathed. Then he came out and Vasishtha chanted the sacred hymns. Immersed in thoughts of his father, he took water in his hands thrice and dropped the same and did the last rites in a proper manner. Completing all the other ceremonies (for the dead), Rāma, accompanied by respectable ministers, kings, great sages, eminent scholars and others, reached the hermitage.

Bharata looked at Seeta and also at the hermitage. Grief flooded his heart. He beat his eyes with his lotus hands and fell at Seeta's divine feet. He wept aloud. Full of tears, his eyes looked like a sea of waves. Bharata's continued anguish made his red eyes overflow with an endless stream of tears. Rāma with his long arms embraced heroic Bharata. Turning towards Seeta, Rāma told her, "Our lord Dasaratha died, unable to bear the long separation from me." A shocked Seeta trembled on hearing the news. Tears rolled from the 'seas' of her two eyes. Holding her hands pressed against the earth (her mother), Seeta bemoaned the death of Dasaratha and wept bitterly. Seeta who had happily walked behind Rāma even through the forest (as if it were a fine city) had never for a moment sorrowed over her predicament. Such a Seeta, was plunged into a sea of grief by the news of Dasaratha's death. She was unable to withstand her agony. The chaste wives of the sages who had assembled in the hermitage, took her in their beautiful arms, held her close to their bodies and bathed her (with the compassion of a mother) in the pure Ganga River. After consoling her, they brought her to Rāma. In the mean time, Sumantira arrived with a host of noble men and the three mothers, Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi, who had brought forth the four exquisite sons. On seeing his mothers, Rāma broke down. He asked them, "Where is my father? Please tell me," and fell at their feet shedding tears all the while. The three mothers joined together and wept bitterly after embracing Rāma with great affection. Watching this, the warriors and women assembled there also wailed and melted into tears like wax before fire with none to console them. The great mothers who had given birth to the heroes, approached the daughter of Janaka, pressed her against their bosoms and were drowned in an ocean of agony. The men of the army, citizens of graceful Ayōdhya, the rest of the women, kings, ministers and others reached Rāma, with broken hearts. The ancient Solar dynasty had the fortune of possessing Rāma who had come out of the serpent bed! The sun, who was the origin of that dynasty,

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plunged into the sea as if to perform the water rites for the deceased Dasaratha, a scion of the dynasty.

The next morning Rāma was surrounded by kings, sages, relatives and his three great brothers. Looking at Bharata, Rāma said affectionately, "The munificent Emperor Dasaratha is dead. Instead of wearing the crown and preparing yourself to govern this land, you are in an ascetic's attire. Dear Bharata, what is the reason for this?" Bharata rose agitatedly and said, "Is there anyone other than you who can follow dharma in this world? How could *you* depart from it? Through reprehensible boons, Kaikeyi not only killed Dasaratha but also forced you to perform unrighteous deeds. Just because I am the son of that sinful Kaikeyi, have I become unfit to undertake penance? This Bharata has become a great sinner having been born to that sinner Kaikeyi who has inflicted untold hardship on this world. I dare not die, nor am I to take to the life of an ascetic. I do not know how to retrieve myself from this big blemish that has fallen on me. Can the despicable qualities of women who have forsaken chastity, or an ascetic devoid of patience, or dharma lacking in compassion, be worse than the sovereignty acquired by flouting established age-old norms? If you, the eldest son of Dasaratha, give up your right to rule the kingdom and live an ascetic's life, will I ever, even through oversight, kill dharma with a sword, devour it, and rule the kingdom? Dasaratha died owing to his boundless love for you, while you walked into a fiery desert. In such circumstances, can I deceitfully and eagerly like a cruel adversary usurp the kingdom which rightfully belongs to you? *My lord, the harm done by your father and the greater harm done by my sinful mother, should both be wiped away by your returning to Ayōdhya and ruling the kingdom."*

Understanding the firmness and the meaning of Bharata's words, Rāma said, "My dear hero, listen to my words carefully. You are aware that virtue, laudable leadership and dharma are protected only through the reign of kings who conduct themselves strictly in accordance with the tenets prescribed in the sacred books. Please bear in mind that scholarly exposition, flawless knowledge, high discipline and divine dispensations should be respected as you would respect preceptors. *If you examine clearly who these preceptors are, you will find that they are none other than our father and mother.* O possessor of knowledge expounded by scholars! Kaikeyi secured the boon, Dasaratha gave the direction, and I followed the dharma of our dynasty. *Can I*

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give up that dharma because of the boon that you seek from me? Is it not the boundless duty of those born as sons to obtain great fame and do excellent service to their parents, instead of presenting them with a garland of everlasting blemish? Will it be proper for me to happily rule this vast kingdom, by making my father a liar, as if he never granted any boon? Can I thus send my father to rule hell? *This kingdom has been inherited by you by the words of our father, based on the boon granted to Kaikeyi. The right to rule the kingdom is now vested in you and therefore you shall rule."*

Bharata replied, "Dear brother born before me! There is no one in the three worlds who can equal you. If you say this land belongs to me, I shall even now return the same to you. Therefore, please come back to Ayōdhya and wear the crown. When the world is in agony without a helping hand, how can you with your mighty shoulders do only as you wish? Please return to Ayōdhya, remove the agony of the grief-stricken people and protect them." Thus pleaded Bharata, holding Rāma's divine feet. Rāma told Bharata again, "Soft-hearted as you are, it will not be just and fair of you because of your great love for me, to make over the kingdom (that you have inherited) to me. My father, out of fear of any blame that may be attributed to him, granted the boon to Kaikeyi. Accordingly, I had agreed on that day to be away in the forest for fourteen years. *Is the period of fourteen years over today for me to comply with your request?* Will the world ever extol any quality other than truth? Will departing from truth lead to anything other than evil? Ponder over these inevitable truths. In obedience to the orders of my father, I will stay in the forest for fourteen years, during which period you shall rule this land given by our father. *Remember that when our Emperor Dasaratha was alive and when he asked me to wear the gem-set crown, I accepted it because I was afraid to refuse.* You must think of that and should not disobey me now. Do as I say. There is no need for you to drown yourself in sorrow."

After Rāma's words, Bharata surged forward to reply, like a flood gushing towards a pit, when he was stopped by Vasishtha. The sage turned to Rāma and said, "O charitable Rāma, listen to what I am going to say about the activities of your great ancestors who possessed great clarity of thought. Lord Tirumāl took birth as a Boar, plunged into the turbulent sea, carried Mother Earth on His crescent horn, and came up. At the end of a yuga, He destroyed all the five elements allowing all the objects to mingle with Him and then created the boundless sea. He rested on that sea in

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effulgence, so that all could easily approach Him. When He was in deep slumber, a lotus with one hundred petals appeared from His navel. From this lotus appeared Lord Brahma with the duty of creation. When He created the earth, your Solar dynasty came into existence. Among the several kings in that dynasty, no one ever transgressed the law of ruling the kingdom until today. There is one more thing that I have to tell you. Noble persons have always said that the preceptor who teaches everything to you with kindness, is the greatest person. If it is true that as a preceptor, I had long ago imparted to you not one but several facets of knowledge, I command you to proceed to Ayōdhya and rule gracefully the kingdom that belongs to you."

Rāma, with his red eyes and folded hands resembling the lotus, bowed to Vasishtha and said, "O great scholar abounding in humility! O son of Lord Brahma! I, too, have something to tell you. Is it proper for a person to go back on his word, after agreeing to do what was ordered either by a noble person, a preceptor or his mother? Is it not better to roam about as an ignorant cur, rather than be a wicked and despicable person who does not implicitly carry out the wishes of the mother, commanded by the father? Even after I have, out of great reverence, assured my father and mother that I would carry out their commands, you ask me to return to Ayōdhya! Please tell me what I have to do hereafter." Unable to find a reply, Vasishtha remained silent. Bharata intervened and told Rāma, "I do not care who rules the kingdom. I have made up my mind to follow you in the fog-ridden forest."

The Devas who had gathered, to watch the happenings were afraid that if Bharata were to take Rāma back to Ayōdhya there would be none to destroy the Rākshasās. They said, "The great Rāma has the nobility to keep the word given to his father, and so, he should go to the forest. It is also the bounden duty of Bharata to look after Kōsala for the period of fourteen years. Both of them should discharge their respective duties." *When the Devas spoke thus, Rāma caught hold of the flowery hands of Bharata and said, "It is not fair to reject the words of the Devas. So far, I had only requested you. Now, I command you to go and protect the kingdom." Bharata replied, "O lord, if so, you must come back to Ayōdhya after the expiry of the fourteen years and rule the kingdom, failing which, I swear in your name that I will immolate myself in the flames of a fire. This is certain."* After undertaking this vow, Bharata was without any distress. Rāma, who considered his fame more important than himself, saw the

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determination of Bharata. Melting with affection, Rāma agreed to his condition. Realising that there was nothing more to be done, Bharata wept. Then he appealed to Rāma to give him his sandals. Accordingly, Rāma gave him his two sandals which were capable of conferring all types of benefits to everyone. Bharata, with tearful eyes and a handsome body covered with dust, considered the sandals as his crown. He kept them on his head and fell at Rāma's divine feet. Then, accompanied by a large circle of relatives including his mothers, a crowd of scholars, sages, the vast army and Sage Vasishtha, Bharata left. Sage Bharadwaja also returned to his abode. The citizens of fertile Ayōdhya as well as the celestials left for their respective abodes. Guhan also left, commanded by Rāma.

Bharata, holding Rāma's divine sandals on his head, crossed River Ganga. He spent the whole night without sleep. Rāma's sandals ruled with distinction over Kōsala, from a village known as Nandi. Weeping day and night, Bharata, through his mental strength, gave up the desires of his five senses and stayed in Nandi. Rāma thought that his people would not leave him, because of their great love for him, if he continued to stay on that hill. He therefore left the place along with his helpful brother, and his wife, Seeta, and proceeded further south.

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ĀRANYA KĀNDAM

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1. THE KILLING OF VIRĀDHA

Seeta of pearly teeth and Rāma and Lakshmana with bows in their hands reached a grove abounding in fruit trees where Sage Atri lived. The two youths, looking like mighty elephants with huge trunks and small eyes, went to the hermitage of the sage and made obeisance to him. Sage Atri was thrilled and happy, as if his kith and kin had come to see him. He said, "Dear sons, seeing you here is no ordinary event. It is like all the gods and all the worlds coming together and visiting us! I wonder who amidst us has done such great penance as to deserve this good fortune!" After staying for a day in the hermitage of Sage Atri, Rāma and Lakshmana left for the Dandaka forest along with Seeta dressed in the splendid clothes and jewels given to her by Anasuya, the wife of Sage Atri.

As the three were walking in the forest, they were confronted by a ferocious Rākshasa known as Virādha. Possessing three heads and a trident in his hand, this Rākshasa wore a 'necklace' of sixteen rogue elephants, thirty-two lions and sixteen yālis. (A yāli is a strange animal looking like a lion with an elephant's trunk). With curly, shining, red hair, the Rākshasa appeared like poison in the form of a mountain! With his red eyes emitting fire, with the clouded sky and the earth shaking, the Rākshasa's appearance frightened even Yama. The Rākshasa had huge ears, which lions mistook for mountain dens, and ear-rings which shone like the peaks of Meru. He was smeared with red paste made out of the blood of warriors who were killed in battle. He would with his huge hands take rutting elephants one by one, put them in his mouth which was bigger than a huge cave, chew them and still suffer from hunger. The Rākshasa's formidable chest was covered with jewels from hooded serpents and celestial chariots. He wore the skins of tigers, elephants and huge pythons. Walking majestically in the forest with feet which could shove aside the silvery Mount Kailas as well as the golden Meru, Virādha caused concern even to the celestials.

Virādha 'a combination of all the fiends' was blessed by Lord Brahma with the strength of a hundred and twenty-five thousand elephants. With fierce eyes and a thunderous voice, walking with great speed, uprooting trees and splitting mountains, Virādha stood before Rāma and Lakshmana. Opening his mouth, and baring his teeth stuck with meat, he asked them to stop. Then in a flash, he caught hold of swan-like Seeta and rose into the sky. Rāma and Lakshmana became furious and shouted, "Hey,

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you deceitful fellow! Where are you running?" Virādha replied, "I cannot be killed because of the boons given to me by Brahma. Even if all the worlds collectively fight me, I can defeat them without weapons. I will spare your lives if you leave this woman in my hands. You can go back happily." With a smile that looked like the white moon, Rāma thought, "This Rākshasa does not seem to know my prowess. He will soon be destroyed." *Rāma twanged the string of his heavy bow. The mighty sound drowned all the fourteen worlds in thunder. Virādha placed Seeta (looking like a parrot caught in the mouth of a huge deceitful cat) on the ground, and stood before Rāma who resembled a mountain of collyrium. Lost in thought for a while, Virādha angrily waved a heavy trident which looked like the submarine fire and hurled it at Rāma. As the trident advanced towards him like the Hālāhala poison with the splendour of a shining star, it was broken in two by Rāma's arrow and fell beyond the eight directions.* Without losing his nerve, Virādha furiously threw huge boulders at Rāma. The shining arrows shot by Rāma at Virādha's forehead, took the boulders thrown by him along with them and wounded him all over. *Uprooting a huge tree, Virādha charged forward to attack the great Rāma, an incarnation of Mahāvishnu come to uphold dharma.* The heroic Rāma, smashed the tree into pieces with four select arrows, and dispatched a dozen more into Virādha's erect shoulders and chest. Looking like a porcupine with the many arrows closely stuck in him, the furious Virādha shook his body violently, forcing all the arrows to fall down. Rāma again shot fiery arrows which pierced the entire body of Virādha. Blood flowed from his body like a mountain stream. Virādha now looked exhausted. The sturdy and strong Rāma and Lakshama felt, "This Rākshasa will not die even if he is attacked by our powerful weapons, because of the boons he has secured." Deciding to sever his strong arms from his body, they unsheathed their swords and jumped onto his shoulders. The bleeding Virādha got back his lost strength. He realised that Rāma and Lakshmana were now on his shoulders. Carrying both of them, Virādha who was bleeding profusely, soared into the sky and moved in circles with great speed. *With dark Rāma and the golden-complexioned Lakshmana on his shoulders, Virādha resembled Garuda (whose wings were the dwelling place of dharma), flying with Balarāma and Krishna seated on him!*

Watching her compassionate husband being carried away by the wicked Virādha, the noble Seeta broke down and fell with her dishevelled hair on the dusty earth like a female swan whose mate was captured. Getting up from the ground, with none to help her or offer words of comfort, with her waist moving like a streak of lightning, Seeta ran after Virādha and said, "Please let go of Rāma and Lakshmana who are the

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very embodiment of dharma; who possess the love of a mother. Instead, consume me." Looking at Seeta crying aloud, Lakshmana became concerned. He told Rāma, "My goddess (Seeta) is in distress. It is not proper to be light-hearted now." Rāma replied, "I only thought of using this Rākshasa as a mount for a while. Killing him is not difficult." Rāma laughed, and with his strong legs rapidly kicked Virādha, who immediately fell down. With their sharp swords, Rāma and Lakshmana severed his arms from his body and jumped down. After losing his arms, Virādha followed Rāma and Lakshmana like an angry Rāhu following the sun and the moon to swallow them. Watching Virādha who did not die even after losing a great deal of blood, Rāma told his brother that it was only proper to bury him. With his sacred feet, Rāma kicked Virādha. As a result, he sank into the river flowing west and fell in a pit dug by the elephantine Lakshmana. The moment he fell in, Virādha was freed from an old curse of Kubera and from his Rākshasa form. *Remembering all the happenings that had led to the curse, Virādha soared into the sky in the form of a Gandharva. Attaining true knowledge transcending the five senses, Virādha realised that Rāma was none other than Lord Tirumāl.*

Extolling Rāma, Virādha said, "Your sacred feet lauded by the Védas cover the world. When such is the greatness of your feet, who can say how sacred are your many forms? If you begin occupying not only the cool sea, but also the four other elements, can they bear you? When the great elephant Gajendra, caught by a crocodile, was writhing in pain and called aloud for the primordial God of the whole universe, was it not you who arrived and saved him? O Lord possessing lotus-eyes full of compassion! You can spread inside and outside every object. Moving everywhere like the kite, have you not taken upon yourself the task of protecting dharma without the assistance of anyone else? Taking birth and dying are but divine pranks, you choose to play! Can even sages who have given up all attachment afford to ignore you? Only if you are constantly in their minds, can they hope to be liberated from subsequent births. You are far above all the gods who are sought by those who want to cross the sea of births through their different religions. *You are the very form of dharma! Are you not the father as well as the mother of all gods including Brahma? You are the whole universe. The entire universe is yours. All the religions which deserve to be seriously read and understood, are subservient to you. Why should you hide yourself like the guilty? Is such a game of māya necessary for you? You begin as if you are hard to be discerned by the devotees; but later you easily appear before them. There are no calves which do not know their mothers; and the mother knows her calves, too. In your case, though as the mother of the whole universe you know all living*

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beings, it is a wonder that they do not know your compassion! Though different gods are worshipped by different people, do they not realise that you are the great God who has to be worshipped even by celestials like Lord Brahma? While the followers of different religions worship different gods, you transcend them all. You merely appear to be sleeping. As Ādisesha, you bear the earth; as the celestial Boar, you hold her on your tusk; you swallow her during pralaya; and as Trivikrama you totally hide her with a single step ! Will not Goddess Lakshmi who dwells in your bosom be angry? O Lord, can you not make your subjects realise, at least to some extent, who you are? You recited the Védas in the form of a swan. Please tell us who taught them to you? Have they disappeared? *What is this māya practised by you which confuses us?* O incomparable Lord! Having left the ocean of milk, you came here because of my previous penance. With your sacred feet, you have enabled me to cross the sea of births!"

Looking at Virādha, Rāma asked him to narrate how he became a Rākshasa. Extolling Rāma, Virādha said, "My name is Tumburu. I come from the celestial world of Kubera. I fell in love with the celestial dancer Rambha. I obtained her after succumbing to her singing and dancing. Because of the sin and disease of lust which made me lose my senses, I was cursed by Kubera to become a Rākshasa. Kubera, however, assured me that when *your* sacred feet touched me, I would get back my original form. From then on till now, I have been killing and eating all types of animals, unable to distinguish between good and bad. Induced by my past karma, I fought with you. Touched by your sacred feet, whose ornaments are the Védas, my mind has become clear! You have removed all my sins. I have become my previous self. Bear with me for having fought with you." After Virādha (a great devotee of Tirumāl) gave up his life, Rāma went deep into the Dandaka forest with Lakshmana and Seeta and reached a grove full of trees, inhabited by Védic sages.

2. SAGE SARABHANGA

Rāma, Lakshmana and Seeta reached Sage Sarabhanga's hermitage which was full of red trees. Just then Devendra arrived. Devendra's body glittered like the jewels worn by celestial women of swan-like gait. Devendra had performed the hundred yāgas described in the scriptures. Except the crowns of the Trinity of Gods, the crowns of all other celestials had come very close to his heroes' anklets. Riding the proud, white elephant Irāvatam, Devendra (along with his consort who resembled Goddess Lakshmi) looked like the radiant Lord Siva. Even the moon with cool rays would feel depressed looking at him who had the canopy of heaven as his royal umbrella. The

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white chowries that were waved around him, were like *'bundles of fame'* cast away by the Rākshasās defeated in their fight with the elephants guarding the eight regions. His lustrous crown could well be said to be the resting-place of the red-rayed sun! The red ruby necklace that decorated his bosom could be compared to Goddess Lakshmi who adorned the bosom of Lord Tirumāl. His shoulder-ornaments resembled the smile of the goddess of victory. Wearing jewels containing several thousand shining gems, Devendra looked like a dark cloud with a shining rainbow. *He wore a garland of flowers of different varieties, the fragrance of which reached several worlds; he possessed a sword as sharp as the triumphant fish-like eyes of celestial women! His resplendent Vajrāyudham when hurled at Rāvana, was not damaged even to the extent of the tip of a paddy seed!* When Devendra of such splendour stood before Sarabhanga who had done great penance, the former was welcomed by the sage. "What brings you here?" Sarabhanga asked. Devendra replied, "O possessor of golden matted hair, Lord Brahma, having realised that even He could not comprehend the great penance done by you, has asked you to come to His world. O father-like sage, the creator of the whole universe, Lord Brahma, has decided to give His world to you. He will come and take you, if you are willing. You know that the world of Brahma is superior to the rest of the worlds." Sarabhanga said, "O universally extolled Devendra, will I seek to attain worlds that are like ephemeral paintings ? I do not aspire for ordinary things. Please realise that my penance transcends the yugas. Attaining or not attaining Brahmaloka does not make any difference to me. Why so many words! I have completed my penance here. *O king of the celestial world, I propose to attain a state which transcends time, which is unchanging, which neither shrinks nor grows, which outlasts even the destruction of the five elements."*

Rāma and Lakshmana who had reached the hermitage, heard a loud sound coming from inside and wondered what it was. Looking at the white Irāvatam decorated with glittering diamonds and possessing four tusks, they realised that Devendra had come to Sarabhanga's hermitage. Leaving Lakshmana and the deer-like Seeta in the grove, Rāma entered the hermitage like a mighty lion. To Devendra, Rāma (the very fruit of the four Védas) appeared like a dark dazzling sun possessing lotus-eyes. Devendra became concerned. He made obeisance to Rāma, the lord of mankind. *Rāma the vanquisher of enemies, Rāma the preceptor who taught the substance of the ocean-like Védas, Rāma who guided everyone to the path of dharma and sent them to heaven, Rāma who was an indestructible protector of the Devas, Rāma who was penance incarnate and the very embodiment of infinite knowledge, Rāma who was like the*

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eyes that saw everything, appeared to be beyond the full comprehension of even Devendra. Unfolding his knowledge of the greatness of Rāma, Devendra said, "You are the sparkling light that pervades all objects and yet is not part of them; you are the sage who has given up all attachment; you are the abode of the huge ocean of mercy which none can swim across; you are the essence discerned through knowledge acquired by studying the Védas; you are a father unto me; you have appeared at the request of beings like us who sought your protection when tormented by enemies; and only because of that, are your two lotus feet treading this huge earth. O Lord who sleeps on the great ocean, you have neither enemies nor friends, you have neither light nor darkness; there is nothing above you or below you; you are neither youthful nor do you age; you have no beginning, middle or end; there is nothing ahead of you and nothing behind you; you will neither be faulted for not protecting us, nor extolled for protecting us ! You possess so many virtues that even if Lord Brahma tries to measure them for several yugas he will not succeed. When you churned the ocean of milk and obtained the nectar of immortality which you offered only to us, how can the Asuras not be your slaves? O flaming red light of awareness! *You were one in the beginning, but later took several forms; and then again at the end of pralaya, you will attain the original oneness! O remover of our troubles! While you protect the virtuous and destroy the sinful, are you not also responsible for the existence of the latter? Dear father, were there not endless doubts and debates among sages and celestials about whether you were or were not the Supreme God, and when the ancient sages swore in the name of Lord Siva that it was you who contained the boundaries of all the worlds, was it not again you who finally removed our doubts?"* After extolling Rāma, Devendra, who firmly believed that great events would soon take place, took leave of the incomparable Sage Sarabhanga.

The sage welcomed Rāma. When he prostrated himself at the sacred feet of the sage, the latter embraced him. Happy with the welcome offered to Seeta and Lakshmana, Rāma felt as if he were lying on the ocean of milk. Listening to Sarabhanga's wise words on dharma, Rāma rested with Seeta till dawn when the sun rose with his innumerable rays removing the cover of darkness. Sarabhanga of true knowledge, resolving to immolate himself in fire in the presence of Rāma, sought his approval. Looking at the master of the Védas, the master archer asked him what his purpose was. The sage replied, "O Lord of Lakshmi, by entering fire, I seek salvation." Rāma asked, "Why do you wish to do this now when I am here?" Sarabhanga who had destroyed (bhanga) the arrows (sara) of Manmatha, excited at giving up his body said,

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"I have been performing a thousand types of yāgas, steadfastly believing that you would be coming here. After your arrival, all my attachment to good and evil stands severed. I do not have anything more to do here. Devendra came here and told me that Lord Brahma had offered me His Satyaloka. I did not accept it wanting to go to Paramapadam, the highest sphere. Therefore, please allow me." The noble Sage Sarabhanga the master of the inscrutable Védas, along with his wife entered the fire and reached the Supreme abode which even celestials, sages, Lord Brahma, and those who have emancipated themselves from good and evil found it difficult to attain. *When the benefit obtained by uttering just one of the several names of Māhavishnu is beyond one's comprehension, is it easy to comprehend the benefit attained by Sage Sarabhanga, who, at the end of his life, actually saw Lord Mahāvishnu Himself?*

3. SAGE AGASTYA

With their strong bows, Rāma and Lakshmana along with Seeta, left the hermitage of Sarabhanga with heavy hearts. They passed many pleasant mountains, trees, diamond-like rocks, rivers full of waves, waterfalls, groves and lakes. All the ancient sages including the mounars (those observing the vow of silence) living in the Dandaka forest rejoiced to see Rāma. Suffering helplessly all along, under the fury of the fiery Rākshasās there, these sages were now transformed just as plants in a burning forest are revived by a downpour of nectarous rain. Afraid even to utter the names of the tormenting Rākshasās, the sages now lost their fear. They looked like calves (in a forest of fire) who were relieved to see their mother return! They had hitherto been unable to fight or counter the invincible Rākshasās. Discerning the object of Rāma's incarnation, they realised that his arrival was the result of their great penance and felt as if they were freed from the sorrow of birth. Though these sages were graced with the strength of penance, because of their self-restraint they were being tormented by these Rākshasās. The sages rose and went up to the heroic Rāma with overflowing love. They showered their blessings on him and requested him to rest in the pleasant hermitage along with Lakshmana and Seeta. After giving them suitable food, the sages left. The next morning they all went to Rāma. Offering them his salutations, Rāma wanted to know the 'command' of the sages. They said, "O protector of the world, we wish to tell you of the cruel happenings here. Heartless Rākshasās without the slightest compassion and bereft of dharma, have oppressed us and forced us to give up our penance. Day and night, we are like deer in a tiger-infested forest.We have lost the strength to confront them. We are no longer sages, having stopped performing penances, reciting the Védas, and helping others to do the same. We also do not keep

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the sacrificial fires burning. Even Devendra takes orders from these Rākshasās. Except you who have come in answer to our penance and prayers, there is no one to save us. O son of Dasaratha, you have appeared like the sun to dispel the darkness of our endless sorrow."

Rāma replied, "Please give up your grief. Unless these Rākshasās assure me that they will not cause you hardship hereafter, my arrows will track and slay them, even if they try to flee into another world. My good fortune has brought me here, though at the cost of the life of the emperor, and the happiness of my mother, the great Bharata and the citizens of Ayōdhya. What is the point of my birth, if I cannot destroy the despicable Rākshasās who cause hardship to righteous sages? I will give up my life if I cannot accomplish this task. You will soon joyfully witness the dancing of the headless trunks of these Rākshasās. *The burden of the quiver and the bow, borne by my shoulders will remove the burden of sorrow borne by all of you.* Those who give up their lives for the sake of cows or brahmins, or the weak or the poor, will be worshipped even by gods. I will annihilate anyone who (instead of supporting dharma) helps these Rākshasās, be it Lord Muruga who killed Soorapadma, or Lord Tirumāl, or Lord Siva who destroyed Tripura. Do not fear." The sages who heard these assertions of Rāma cast away their sorrow and became jubilant. They sang the sweet Védas, danced for joy and said, "O Lord, our penance and the Védas prove that if you become angry, even thirty crores of worlds (leave alone these three worlds) cannot equal your might! Therefore stay with us in this forest, protecting us." Falling at their sacred feet, Rāma agreed to their request.

After staying peacefully in the Dandaka forest for ten years, Rāma and Lakshmana left (on the considered advice of the sages) to meet Sage Agastya. Traversing narrow pathways through mountains and bamboo-ridden forests, Rāma, Lakshmana and Seeta who were free from conceit, reached the grove inhabited by Sage Sudeekshana who was free from sorrow, and prostrated themselves at his glorious feet. Sudeekshana welcomed the guests and persuaded them to stay in the fragrant grove for some time. After extending all courtesies, he said, "What great penance have I performed to see you here?" With great love for the sage, Rāma replied, "Among all the primary sages descended from the four-faced Brahma, who has done greater penance than you? Of all those born in great families, who is there more blessed than I in obtaining your grace?" To these words of incomparable Rāma, the sage replied, "I am offering all my penance to you, my most worthy guest." Rāma said, "O lord, no penance can equal your grace. However, I wish to tell you that I have an

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unfulfilled desire. I want to meet Sage Agastya." Sage Sudeekshana said, "I, too, wanted to suggest this to you. Please do go and see him. After that there is no greatness that you will not achieve. He also looks forward to your visit. By meeting him, you will be doing good to the Devas and the rest." Showering countless blessings on Rāma, the sage directed him to Agastya's hermitage. Rāma and Lakshmana fell at the feet of Sudeekshana and left for Sage Agastya's honey-shedding grove.

Mahāvishnu had covered the world with His divine foot, while Sage Agastya had measured the world with Tamil, the great language. The arrival of Rāma and Lakshmana gave him boundless joy. Agastya had in days of yore swallowed the whole sea (when beseeched by the celestials) to expose the Asuras hiding there. *This sage who was like a small seed that contained the huge banyan tree, had easily consumed the treacherous Rākshasa known as Vātāpi and had relieved the world of the distress caused by him.* When the yōgis wanted to know how they could cross the Vindhya mountain without difficulty, Sage Agastya stood on it firmly like an elephant and pushed it down into the nether world to free the yōgis from any obstruction. When once, the northern region occupied by Lord Siva went down, and the Lord wished the equilibrium of the land to be restored, Sage Agastya went to the southern region and created another mountain there. Sage Agastya had mastered the four Védas! *The great Tamil grammar taught by Lord Siva to Sage Agastya was presented in the form of a book by the latter.* Sage Agastya had been looking forward to seeing Rāma, the great Lord present in all the worlds, in the Védas, and in the very thoughts of everyone. The sage was thrilled that the very substance of the Prime God, inscrutable even to Lord Brahma — even after grinding the resounding Védas on the grindstone of systematic knowledge — would soon be standing before him and talking to him. He was happy with the thought, "Rāma the unique remedy for the poison called Rākshasās, has arrived; henceforth the celestials are saved; and the sages will be firmly treading the path of dharma. *The rain (Rāma) has come from the sky, to put out the forest fire (the Rākshasās' anger), which, capable of burning even thunder, was destroying and consuming the lives of the people."*

On seeing Rāma, tears of joy flowed from the sharp lotus eyes of Sage Agastya who had carried the exquisite Kāveri water in his kamandalam to protect all living beings in the eight directions and seven worlds. When Rāma prostrated himself at the feet of the sage, the latter with moist eyes welcomed and embraced him. The sages present there surrounded him with great affection, chanted the Védas, sprinkled

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water from their jugs and showered flowers, while Agastya took him inside the cool and fragrant grove and duly looked after him. Thanking Rāma, Sage Agastya said, "O king of compassion, by your visit to my abode, you have fulfilled my great penance." Rāma bowed and replied, "By gaining your grace which even the Devas and sages cannot secure, I have conquered all the worlds." The sage (who was like the mighty Lord Siva) said, "O universally respected Rāma, having learnt that you were in the Dandaka forest, I was expecting your arrival. Do stay here, perform all the penance you wish, kill the Rākshasās if they make their appearance, and remove sorrow from our minds. Most undoubtedly by your stay here, the Védas will prosper; Manu's laws will endure; dharma will live; the oppressed Devas will flourish; the Rākshasās will be suppressed." Rāma said, "O scholar of the Védas, I have decided to destroy the arrogant Rākshasās and put an end to their misdeeds. Is it not therefore better that I proceed in the southerly direction? What does your grace wish?" *Agreeing with Rāma, the Sage held out a bow and said, "This bow which deserves to be worshipped by me and the three worlds, was in the hands of the ancient Lord Tirumāl.* Please accept it with the ever-full quiver of arrows." Giving Rāma the bow and the quiver, along with a sword which outweighed all the worlds, and a scorching arrow belonging to Lord Siva, Sage Agastya added, "Dear son, there is a hillock surrounded by tall trees and lofty sand-dunes, with a cool grove full of flowing streams. The place is known as *Pancavati.* It abounds in plantain trees, red rice stalks and flowers dripping with nectar; it has rivers like the Gōdavari and the Kāveri; it has storks and swans for Seeta to play with. Go and stay there." Rāma then took leave of the sage and proceeded towards *Pancavati,* followed affectionately by Lakshmana, the sweet-tongued Seeta, and the thoughts of Sage Agastya.

4. JATĀYU

Rāma, Lakshmana and Seeta travelled southwards crossing great rivers, sturdy mountains and dense forests. After covering some distance, they saw Jatāyu the king of vultures. Like the rising sun's rays which brighten the eastern mountain (resembling molten gold), Jatāyu was perched on a mountain. The scene was like the moon light embracing the peak of the Mandara mountain. While his crimson-coloured body brightened the dark sky above the mountain, his beautiful legs spread their red sheen below. *Though he possessed small eyes, he could see far like an impeccable, learned, sharp, truthful and wise minister with an enquiring mind.* He fed Yama with the lives of sword-wielding Rākshasās, while he consumed their bodies. He possessed

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a beak which he trimmed each day and kept as sharp as the goad meant for the celestial elephant Irāvatam. He wore a garland of nine gems which looked like the nine planets. He had the Meru mountain for a throne and the dazzling sun for a crown. His fame was beyond words. He was the son of Aruna, the charioteer of Soorya. Jatāyu had lived through aeons as if each was but a day for him. The hillock on which he rested sank down, unable to bear his weight.

When Rāma and Lakshmana came near Jatāyu, they thought, "If this is not one who has come to seek his own destruction, he must be that strong Garuda." Jatāyu also looked at the heroic Rāma and Lakshmana and thought, "These are not sages who are doing penance. Can they be celestials? I know Devendra and the other gods. I also know the Trinity of Gods because I always see them. I have seen Manmatha with my eyes. But he is no match even for the dust on the feet of this lotus-eyed pair. Then who are these who have come along with an exquisite woman comparable only to the divine Lakshmi? *Looking like a dark mountain and a crimson mountain, and with chests that could be the abode of Lakshmi, these two remind me of my unique friend Emperor Dasaratha."* With thoughts like these, Jatāyu addressed them, "O valiant heroes with bows and arrows! Please let me know who you are." They replied that they were the sons of Dasaratha. Overflowing with joy and wanting to embrace them, Jatāyu descended from the hillock, approached Rāma and said, "I do hope the shoulders of that great emperor are still strong." Rāma replied, "Dasaratha has left for his heavenly abode, after firmly establishing the unforgettable entity known as truth." The news of the death of his beloved Dasaratha upset Jatāyu so much that he swooned. Rāma and Lakshmana immediately held him in their mighty arms and drenched him with their tears.

Jatāyu recovered consciousness and lamented aloud, "O king of kings! O enemy of falsehood! O jewel of truth and fame's abode! Why have you left us to suffer the agony of your absence? You possessed the royal umbrella which gave nectar to the beings of the world and protected them. Was it to test the quality of my friendship that you left this world while you were duty-bound to sustain it? Probably because I am a beast, I do not have the decency to give up my life but continue to live, even after learning of your death. When you killed that fierce Asura Campara, you openly acknowledged my help and said that you were the body and I the soul. You always spoke the truth. Does that mean that Yama has sent you, the body, to heaven while I, the soul, am still here? Is it proper for me to weep like women, instead of giving up my life (by falling into fire) and enhancing my fame?" Jatāyu got up, looked at Rāma and Lakshmana and

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said, "O young and shining sons of the emperor who conquered the seven worlds! Please listen. I am the son of Aruna, Soorya's charioteer. I can go to all the places traversed by my father. I am a great friend of Emperor Dasaratha. Born long ago, I am the king of vultures born after my brother Sampāti. My name is Jatāyu." Immediately Rāma and Lakshmana paid homage to him with folded hands. They shed copious tears out of their love for him and also out of great sorrow. They saw in Jatāyu their father Dasaratha who had gone to heaven for their sake.

Embracing Rāma and Lakshmana, Jatāyu said, "Dear sons, you have to perform my last rites! I will fall into fire and give up my life this very day." Looking at Jatāyu through pearly tears, Rāma and Lakshmana said, "Our father Dasaratha who should have saved us during our time of difficulties, has gone away to the celestial world. If you also leave, who is there for us? You are one who does not deviate from the virtuous path. We have so far suffered great hardship having entered the forest after leaving our mothers, our dear father, and the gates of Ayōdhya. After seeing you, we felt some relief from that sorrow. Will you, too, leave us now?" Jatāyu was touched. He said, "Dear sons, if you say that I should not die now, I will join Dasaratha only after you get back to Ayōdhya. But why have you come to the forest instead of ruling the country? Irrespective of whether it was the Devas, Asuras, Nāgas or anyone else who have harmed you, I will slay them and give back the kingdom to you." Rāma immediately looked at Lakshmana. The latter narrated to Jatāyu, in detail, all that had happened because of their step-mother Kaikeyi.

Jatāyu said, "O charitable Rāma, by carrying out the words of your step-mother Kaikeyi and giving away your kingdom to your brother, you have made your father uphold truth. Who could have done the great deed done by you?" Embracing the lotus-eyed Rāma and kissing his head, Jatāyu added, "Dear valiant son, you have brought fame to Dasaratha and to me." Looking at the swan-like Seeta, Jatāyu asked Rāma, "O son of the emperor, please tell me who this lady with the shining forehead is." Starting from the slaying of Tātakai, the breaking of Siva's bow, the wedding of Seeta and finally the entry into the forest, Lakshmana narrated everything to Jatāyu. He became happy and said, "You have left your land and come. Please stay in this forest till you go back to your country. I will protect you." Rāma replied, "Agastya told us that there was a fine place on the banks of the beautiful River Gōdāvari. We wish to go and stay there." Jatāyu said, "That great place is an excellent one. You can stay there and do your penance. I will show it to you." *Spreading his wings, Jatāyu flew in the sky enabling Rāma, Lakshmana and Seeta to walk in the shade of his feathers.*

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After leading them to Pancavati, the impeccable Jatāyu left. Jatāyu who knew the great strength of the Rākshasās there, decided to protect his daughter-in-law Seeta, and his children Rāma and Lakshmana like a mother-bird would her offspring.

5. SOORPANAKHA

The heroes Rāma and Lakshmana along with Seeta saw the cool Gōdāvari adorning the land like a jewel. Flowing through the five tracts (hilly, sylvan, arid, agricultural and maritime), the river which possessed all wealth was useful for the field and appeared like a beautiful poem composed by great poets. The river shone like a lotus face with lilies for 'eyes'! Her waves threw up flowers as if bowing before the divine feet of Rāma and others! Her ripples made her look as if she was sighing and weeping for the hardship caused to the truthful children Rāma, Lakshmana and Seeta in the forest. *Seeing two cakravaka birds resting on a lotus bed, Rāma looked at Seeta's breasts, while Seeta (bedecked with jewels), seeing two big sand-dunes, turned her eyes on the mighty shoulders of Rāma. Watching the swans walking on the banks of the Gōdāvari, the noble Rāma looked at Seeta's graceful gait. When Seeta saw a male elephant walk away after drinking water from the river, she gave an exquisite smile thinking of Rāma's far superior majestic gait.* Rāma looked at the moving water-creepers and instantly looked at Seeta's waist; Seeta saw red lotuses in the midst of black lilies and looked at Rāma. At the divine place, Pancavati, near that river full of water, they finally stayed in a beautiful parnasalai (hermitage) built by Lakshmana.

Soorpanakha was a Rākshasi born to annihilate the clan of Rāvana, the dark sapphire-like king of the Rākshasās. She was his sister, born after him to stay with him like a deadly disease biding its time. Her flowing hair was copper coloured and she had a body that had grown with raging lust. She was like a death-knell to the sages who had done great penance in this world. Strong enough to go about freely in this world she stayed alone in the forest. Prompted by ruthless fate, she reached the hermitage of Rāma. Soorpanakha who was to cause the end of her kith and kin, saw Rāma who had given up his divine 'sleep' and come to relieve the Devas of the menace of the Rākshasās. Looking at Rāma, Soorpanakha felt, "Manmatha who rests in the minds of everyone, has no form. Burnt by Siva's furious eye, he probably attained this fine form after doing penance, and is before me. The handsome arms of this man cannot be compared to any tree or mountain. They can only be the trunks of the elephants that shoulder the earth. Except a mountain of sapphire, not even the famous Meru can match this hero's rock-like shoulders, well trained in fighting with

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the bow. My eyes are not long enough to scan this lotus-eyed man's large chest from shoulder to shoulder. His shining face cannot be compared to a fully blossomed lotus, or to the waxing and waning moon which has a blemish. *Why does this man put his body to hardship with penance? What penance has penance done to subject such a handsome man to further penance? How fortunate is Earth to have the sacred feet of this man (with the gait of an elephant) walk on her! The grass growing here like hair standing on end, reveals how thrilled she is.*

"It is only because the dazzling body of this man (with his teeth shining like the moon) has not been seen by the sun, that it shamelessly continues to move high up in the sky shedding its dull light! This man has shoulders which surpass mountains that cannot be crossed, and has lips that cannot be compared to any object as there is nothing that is redder than coral. *What penance has his bark-clothing done (which even a golden cloth has failed to do) to be able to embrace his waist which humbles even the sun? If only he had allowed his rain-bearing cloud-like locks of hair to fall loose, they would have destroyed the lives of all women. Can beautiful ornaments ever augment the beauty of this man? Can the beauty of Kaustubham, the king of jewels, be enhanced by placing another jewel on it? Devendra is not worth the dust on this man's feet inspite of all his pious wishes! Because this Devendra rules all the worlds, Brahma, their creator has flawed Himself." Soorpanakha was drowned in her lustful thoughts which grew greater in volume than the sea and the sky, while her chastity diminished like the fame of a miser.* Suffering from lust for Rāma, Soorpanakha cast her eyes on his handsome shoulders. Unable to move her eyes, she stood as still as a portrait, in the sky. She then thought, "I will embrace the shoulders of this man. If I cannot do so, I will certainly die even if I have consumed the nectar of immortality." She felt, "He might spurn me if I go to him as a fierce-toothed Rākshasi consuming lives. It is better to appear like a lisping nightingale with lips as red as kovvai fruit and the complexion of a peacock!" Chanting a mantra, Soorpanakha conjured up the form of Goddess Lakshmi and acquired a shining body and a beautiful face which was brighter than the moon. The treacherous Soorpanakha, with a slender waist, with lotus feet which put the red cotton flower to shame and looking like a young peacock with the gait of a female swan, came down like poison. She resembled the beautiful young Lakshmi hailing from the lotus flower with a golden pollen anther possessing the beauty of a parrot. With her two sharp sword-like eyes, Soorpanakha descended like a streak of lightning from the sky. With the beauty of fragrant karpaga flowers and sweet words, Soorpanakha full of lust, landed like a peacock with the eyes of a deer.

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Rāma looked in the direction from which came the tinkling sound of anklets, girdle and necklaces, and the humming of bees (from the flowers) announcing the arrival of a woman. He saw a nectarous feminine form whose waist was bent with the weight of beautiful breasts. Looking at this beauty (not seen either in the nether world of the Nāgas or in the celestial or terrestrial worlds), he wondered, "Who among those adorned with jewels possesses such boundless beauty?" Full of lust, Soorpanakha looked at Rāma's handsome face and made obeisance to his feet with her crimson hands. Hurling her 'spears' (looks) at Rāma, she stood by his side like a shy deer. Rāma the origin of the Védas told her, "O damsel resembling Tirumagal! May your arrival bring good things. Is it not our virtuous deeds that have brought you here? What is your name and place? Who are your kin?" The foolish Soorpanakha said, "I am the daughter of the grandson of the Lotus-born Lord Brahma and the sister of Kubera (Lord Siva's friend). I am a maiden known as Kāmavalli. I am the younger sister of Rāvana the conqueror of the three worlds." Wondering how a Rākshasi could be so beautiful, Rāma said, "If you are in truth the sister of that fiery Rāvana, how did you acquire this beautiful form? Tell me honestly." Soorpanakha promptly replied, "I did not feel it was proper to live with that deceitful and fierce Rāvana and other Rākshasās. Able to sift good from bad, I followed the path of dharma. I did penance that destroyed sins, pleased the gods, and obtained this beautiful form."

Rāma said, "O beautiful woman, why have you come here alone though you are the sister of Rāvana who is served even by Devendra?" The untruthful Soorpanakha said, "O faultless one, I do not mix with Rākshasās. I am with the celestials and great sages. I have come here seeking something from you." Rāma thought, "It is hard to know the mind of this lovely woman with an exquisite forehead. I will, however, know it in a few moments." He asked Soorpanakha, "What is it that you want from me? I will help you if I can." Soorpanakha replied, "It is not proper, for women born in noble families, to speak out their amorous feelings. But still, because I have none to help me out, I have no choice but to request you to save me from the hardship caused by Manmatha." Looking at the manner in which Soorpanakha expanded and contracted her eyes and rolled her breasts, Rāma felt, "This woman has no shame and has base thoughts." Unable to gauge the mind of the charitable Rāma who was silent, the deceitful Soorpanakha wondered, "After knowing my feelings, will he oblige me or spurn me?" With an unsteady mind she said again, "You who cannot be portrayed! Had I known of your arrival here, I would not have lost myself in the work entrusted to me by the sages and wasted my youth!"

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Rāma felt that the despicable woman did not possess any virtue and that she had evil intentions. He said, "O beautiful lady, what you have said is against an age-old practice. You are a brahmin while I hail from a royal dynasty." Soorpanakha replied, "O warrior, though my father Vishravas was a brahmin who had mastered the Védas, my mother, as chaste as Arundati, was the daughter of the king of Sālakadangada. If caste is the barrier, I am saved!" With a mischievous smile Rāma said, "Dear lady, the noble ones have said that humans should not marry Rākshasās who know no hardship." Soorpanakha felt it was a folly to have disclosed that she was Rāvana's sister. She told Rāma, "You who are like the Lord who sleeps on the serpent bed! I have already told you that I have got rid of the blemish of my Rākshasa ancestry by worshipping the celestials." Rāma replied, "One of your brothers (Rāvana) is the lord of the three worlds, and the other is the god of wealth (Kubera). If *they* offer you to me I will accept you. Otherwise, lonely as you are, please go to another place." Soorpanakha persisted and said, "O possessor of handsome shoulders, we have the Gandharva wedding meant for a man and a woman in love. My two elder brothers will approve of our marriage after the event. I wish to tell you something more. My brothers are the enemies of sages. You are alone here in the garb of an ascetic. If you marry me they will befriend you. They will make heaven and earth subservient to you." Rāma laughed, displaying his bright teeth, and said sarcastically, "How many benefits I will attain as a result of your benevolence! I shall obtain the riches given by the Rākshasās, and will have an everlasting life with you. The great penance I did after leaving Ayōdhya seems to have conferred these benefits on me!"

Creeper-like Seeta, the queen among women and the jewel of the earth, came out of the fragrant hermitage. She stood by the side of Rāma whose effulgence would dazzle the eyes of all including Lord Brahma! Senseless open mouthed Soorpanakha saw before her the radiant body of Seeta who was the embodiment of chastity that could burn the furious belligerent Rākshasās. Soorpanakha thought, "I do not think this man would have brought his wife here; and there is also no woman here possessing as beautiful a form as this. Has Goddess Lakshmi, leaving the lotus, her abode, come here placing her sacred feet on this land?" Looking at Seeta's beauty and poise for a long time, Soorpanakha felt, "There is no end to her great beauty. Any inadequacy in her portrait can only be that of the artist's. When even I, a woman, cannot take my eyes or mind off this beauty, what about others?" Gazing at the heroic Rāma and again at the lovely Seeta, Soorpanakha stood wondering, "Lord Brahma after great thought has obviously created these two as the ultimate in beauty for a man and a woman in all the three worlds. This dark flower-complexioned man shining like

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gold does not appear to be the husband of this woman with a lightning-like waist. This dainty-footed exquisite woman must have come like me seeking this man!"

Soorpanakha told Rāma, "This deceitful woman is a Rākshasi, an adept in māya. We do not know what is in her mind. She has a fake form and lives on meat. I am frightened of her. Please chase her way." Rāma smiled and said, "You are very shrewd. Who can cheat you? You are good, so you reveal your thoughts. Look at her intently. Is she a deceitful Rākshasi?" As the sweet chaste Seeta approached Rāma, the deceitful Soorpanakha who was burning like fire, threatened her with the words, "You Rākshasi! How dare you come here when we two are conversing?" The swan-like Seeta was frightened. Hurting her cotton-like feet and lightning-like waist, she ran and embraced the shoulders of Rāma. She looked like a coral creeper on a rain-bearing cloud. Rāma who realised that even light-hearted pranks with fierce-toothed Rākshasis might lead to great harm, told Soorpanakha, "Desist from evil deeds. If my brother comes to know of your behaviour, he will be furious. You had better leave this place quickly." Soorpanakha said, "While the Trinity of Gods are doing penance to obtain me, how can you spurn me for the sake of this despicable cheat?" Disgusted that the Rākshāsi did not depart even after he had dismissed her, Rāma went back into his hermitage along with Seeta.

Soorpanakha felt as though she had lost her senses and her life. Unable to breathe, she stood still for some time and thought, "This man is worthless. Instead of showing his love for me, he displays anger. He has great love for that woman with collyrium-like dark hair." Without staying there any longer, she began scheming about how she would obtain and embrace Rāma that very day. She then entered her crystal room in the lovely grove near by. The sun moved to the western horizon making the sky crimson. Soorpanakha suffered intensely from lust as if the poison of a cobra had gone to her head. *Like Rāma's sharp shaft entered the mighty chest of Tātakai, Manmatha's shafts entered and came out of Soorpanakha making her fear for her very life.* Though she wanted to have Manmatha for her 'food' with the full moon for a 'dish', she did not have the required strength. The cool breeze pierced her chest, like the sharp spear of Yama, and she fell prostrate. She wanted to pull out mountains and fill the sea with them; but pierced by the rays of the full moon she had lost her strength and could not do so. She furiously wanted to destroy all groves and crush every flower, but desisted, shivering at the sight of the nightingale rejoicing with her mate. She decided angrily to bring the serpent Rāhu to swallow the merciless moon that caused her hardship; but could not do so because she suffered from the cool seasonal

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breeze that caressed her breasts. Blocks of ice that she applied on her tender breasts, melted like butter on a stone heated by fire. When the cold water in which she bathed became boiling water because of her hot sighs, she wondered whether there was a place at all where she could hide from the roaring sea and the harsh Manmatha. *With the heat of her body melting even the cool moonstone, she began raising her hands in worship whenever she came across a dark cloud or a pillar of bluestone because they resembled Rāma.*

Making it impossible for the full moon, the seasonal breeze and Manmatha to find her, Soorpanakha entered a cave inhabited by furious serpents. With her breasts heated by thenral (the southern breeze), Soorpanakha helplessly rolled on tender twigs. Imagining that she saw the form of the cloud-complexioned Rāma, she became exhausted. She was stupefied when the vision disappeared. Despicable Soorpanakha taking the dark clouds to be Rāma, embraced them with her breasts. When, due to their heat, these clouds became heated and disappeared, she wept. There was no limit to her lust. That senseless Rākshasi suffered acutely as if caught in the pralaya fire. Her desire to live with Rāma, acting like a potion, kept her alive. Shivering as if she had licked poison, she beseeched Rāma to relieve her of her lust for having entered her mind! Willing to give up her lust even if she were to lose her dear life, she thought, "That woman whose eyes are like the black lily or kayal fish has the greatness of Goddess Lakshmi. Will Rāma ever look at me?" While Soorpanakha was lovelorn, the sun rose to remove darkness, like the appearance of Rāma to remove the Rākshasās who had pervaded the three worlds. After sunrise, Soorpanakha realised that she was still alive! She thought, "As long as that beautiful woman is by his side, he will not look at me. I will snatch her away and quickly hide her and then live with him who is in love with her. That alone is real life for me."

Soorpanakha came back to the hermitage. She saw Rāma performing the morning sandhyāvandanam; but she failed to see Lakshmana in the fragrant grove keeping a watch over beautiful Seeta of the moon-like forehead. Thinking that Seeta was alone, and not wanting to lose time, the treacherous Soorpanakha went behind her. This was seen by vigilant Lakshmana from inside the grove full of fruits. Warning Soorpanakha loudly to desist from her intentions, Lakshmana rushed towards her and thought of killing her. But he gave up the idea at once because it was a sin to kill a woman. Catching hold of her flaming hair and twisting it, instead, he gave her a kick and pulled out his sword. Soorpanakha tried to lift Lakshmana into the sky. But he pushed her to the ground. Advising her not to indulge in such deeds, Lakshmana cut off her

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nose, ears and nipples. Thereafter, with the ebbing of his anger, he let go of her hair. Soorpanakha's screams spread in all directions and were heard even by the celestials. Her suffering was beyond description. Her nose bled so profusely that it softened the earth. *With Lakshmana's cutting off of Soorpanakha's nipples and nose it was as if a day for commencing the task of severing the crowned heads of Rāvana had been chosen.* Soorpanakha who pounded the earth with her legs and screamed with pain, was a harbinger of the destruction of Khara and other Rākshasās. She looked like a huge cloud pouring a rain of blood. Soorpanakha, born in the race of Rākshasās who never experienced fear, now suffered from severe pain. She would stand up to the sky; she would again fall on the ground, lie there and weep; she would become exhausted; she would display her grief through her hands; she would swoon and then she would get up and shout, "What misfortunes I have to suffer because I was born a woman!"

Soorpanakha pressed a cloth over her severed nose, sighed like a hot furnace, hit the ground with her hands, and held and saw the pathetic condition of her two breasts. Sweating all over, she ran with her strong legs. Finally she collapsed from excessive bleeding. Moving about again in the mire created by her own blood, she called out the names of all her relatives in a loud voice (which frightened even the Devas and Yama) and lamented, "O mountain-like Rāvana who once lifted Mount Kailas! When you rule even this earthly world, is it not shameful that men in the garb of ascetics are roaming about fearlessly with their bows? Is suppressing the celestials alone a herioc act for you? Will you not come and avenge the heinous acts done to me by those in the garb of ascetics? O Rāvana of greater strength than the Trinity of Gods! *Has the good old saying, 'When the tigress is behind, no cub will be lifted,' been proved wrong?* Will you not come to witness my agony? Will not the hero who saw the back of fleeing Devendra, come and see my shame here? O Rāvana, possessor of Siva's sword! You subjugated the planets, heaven, wind, water, fire and Yama who controls even time! Have you surrendered your strength because you do not have the prowess to fight these two men here? With your sturdy shoulders you broke the tusks of the elephants guarding the eight directions, and crushed mountains! Will you not direct your anger towards these men, who, while they are as handsome as Manmatha, are not worth the dust under your sandals? Are Rāvana and Indrajit bereft of their prowess which once destroyed the celestials? Has that prowess now gone to mere men who were considered food for us?

"O Khara! You used to ridicule Hara (Siva), Hari (Vishnu), and Ayan (Brahma) who came to the front! Why do you not come and see my agony? Is it because the

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Rākshasās have lost their strength after the added strength secured by these men who hide behind trees in the forest and do penance? O Rāvana, while Devendra, Siva and Brahma obey you, and all the seven worlds are brought under the rule of your white umbrella, how can I shamelessly come and show my face in your court? Dear brother, a man here has kicked and pushed me and severed my nose. He proudly admires his shoulders, while I look at the ground and weep. Should I suffer from this agony in this forest ruled by Khara? O Rāvana! O Rāvana! Has not the fame you achieved by breaking the tusks of the elephants guarding the eight directions been brought to naught by the loss of my nose? O my nephew! O Indrajit my nephew! While you destroyed the Dānavas and imprisoned Devendra, should I wither away here out of shame after my disfigurement? Will you not come to see the strength of these humans? *O Khara and Dooshana born in the Rākshasa race possessing bright jewels which can pierce the night, and weapons which can break rocks! Have you all, like Kumbhakarna, fallen into deep sleep? Is that why you do not hear my call?"*

As Soorpanakha wailed and rolled on the steps of the beautiful hermitage, handsome-shouldered Rāma appearing like an emerald mountain, arrived there after finishing his sandhyāvandanam in the River Godāvari. Soorpanakha saw Rāma and said, "O my lord, see how I suffer for the sin of falling in love with your handsome body." Then she fell on the mire created by her blood and tears. Rāma asked her who she was, realising that this woman with dishevelled hair must have done some heinous crime and that her ears and nose must have been severed by Lakshmana himself. Soorpanakha replied, "Do you not know me? I am the sister of Rāvana who has vanquished all enemies and who owns all the worlds from heaven downwards." Rāma asked her, "Why did you leave the mighty abode of the Rākshasās? Why have you come here where we are doing penance?" Soorpanakha replied, "O remedy for the burning disease of love! Did I not come here in search of you yesterday?" Rāma asked, "Are you the one who came here with kayal eyes, like Goddess Lakshmi hailing from the lotus flower?" Soorpanakha replied, "Handsome king, if the beautiful breasts, ears and nose of a woman are severed, will she not lose her beauty?" Rāma, the Lord of all living beings, looking at Lakshmana asked, "What was the fault she had knowingly committed that prompted you to sever her dangling ears and beautiful nose?" Lakshmana bowed at Rāma's feet and said, "I do not know whether this woman (with sharp teeth) came here in search of food or was prompted by a set of sinners. But this fierce woman came with fiery eyes towards noble Seeta as if to seize her and take her away."

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Even before Lakshmana finished speaking, the treacherous Soorpanakha addressed Rāma, "King! You hail from a land full of water resources where even a female frog is provoked to jealousy! Will not my mind boil at the sight of another woman coming as my rival?" Rāma said, "We have come here to wipe out the fierce Rākshasās who indulge in cowardly fights. Instead of uttering sinful words and getting destroyed, you had better go far away from this sacred forest." *Soorpanakha replied, "Even Devas, including Brahma, who do not suffer the ravages of time, like the greying of hair and the shrivelling of skin, pay homage to Rāvana. Therefore, it is not good for you to be in a hurry to seek his wrath. If you are interested in knowing what is good for you, listen to me. Rāvana will not let off one who has maimed his sister. He will cut off the tongue of such a person. As a result of what you have done to me, your entire family is going to be destroyed. Hereafter, you will not be able to survive.* Owing to your heinous act, you will all lose your beauty as well as your lives. Whereas, if you accept me and protect my life, I will in turn protect you from Rāvana. Otherwise, there will be none to save you from his wrath.

"Though a chaste woman does not normally extol her own virtues, I propose to let you know of my greatness, because of my anxiety and love for you. Will you not tell your younger brother who has maimed me, that I am the sister of Rāvana who is stronger than all the Devas? I can protect you in all great wars. I can take you to heaven! I can offer you several fruits as tasty as meat. What do you achieve by giving up a woman like me who can look after you? Of what use is this woman, as dainty as a flower, to you? Show me if you can, a woman like me (who has the greatness of my race, my goodness, my capacity to offer what you want, my intelligence, my beauty and my youth), in this or the celestial world! Though you have severed my nose, I can get it back in a moment, if you accept me and show me your grace. After all, is not a long nose an unnecessary appendage for a woman? Will not my life belong to you if you accept my love? Is not excessive beauty that makes all and sundry fall in love, poisonous? Is it not adequate if those who possess me are pleased with me? Is Manmatha who tortures me like your heartless brother, another of your brothers? After all, was it not with some purpose that my nose was severed? Probably you did so, because I cannot go anywhere else (with none to look at me) and I will have to stay alone with you. In that case my love for you becomes twofold. If fiery and hateful Rākshasās were to see my state and become furious, they would destroy all the worlds because of you. Those hailing from noble families will not allow such a catastrophy to happen. Save yourself from that blemish and live happily with me."

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The divine Rāma told Soorpanakha, "O treacherous Rākshasi, the arrow which took away the life of Tātakai that tormentor of the world who delivered your mother, is still with me. I have come here with the strength of my shoulders and penance, to annihilate the Rākshasās. If you do not shed the bad in your character, and go away from here, you are certain to lose your life. We are the sons of King Dasaratha. We have come to this lovely fragrant forest, obeying the orders of our mother Kaikeyi. Because the sages and others who live here have requested us to protect them, we have decided to go back to Ayōdhya only after wiping out the vast Rākshasa clan which is as limitless as the sea. You may feel, 'After all what can these two men do to the Rākshasās who have vanquished even the Devas?' If you have the capacity, bring all those Rākshasās and make them stand before us. We will kill them in your very presence." Soorpanakha replied, "O ruler of a land overflowing with water! Yes, you can kill all the Rākshasās provided you take me, ignoring my wide mouth and fierce teeth. Even if you do not want to leave this woman with bamboo-like arms (Seeta), will I be too much of a burden to you? Being a Rākshasi, I know the art of māya of the Rākshasās like a snake which knows the movements of another snake. I will be able to help you to fight them. In case you feel that Seeta is there in your heart, I will suggest a way out. Please ask your brother to marry me and allow me to be his wife. The three of us can conquer the entire world and when all of you get back to Ayōdhya I will be able to attain any form that you want. *If your brother who is full of anger wonders how he can live with a woman without a nose, tell him how you have been living for so long with a woman without a waist!"* Rāma and Lakshmana were quite disgusted with the behaviour of Soorpanakha. Lakshmana told Rāma, "If this woman is not killed now, she will go on troubling us endlessly. What is your command?" When Soorpanakha saw Rāma's face, she knew that they were not going to show her any mercy. She realised that if she stayed any longer, she would lose her life. She told them, "Having lost my nose, ears and breasts, did you really think I would want to live with you? I only wanted to know the state of your minds. I shall immediately bring Khara who moves faster than air and who is deadlier than fire. He will be your Yama!

6. THE SLAYING OF KHARA

Soorpanakha, with her dishevelled hair, grotesque bleeding nose and wide mouth, fell like a dark cloud at the feet of mighty Khara who would spew smoke before uttering his usual words! *Her loud shout was like the thunder of mighty drums announcing the day appointed by Yama for the destruction of the Rākshasās.*

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Like a huge python caught in fire, she rolled in pain. Khara whose eyes appeared red (as if they were soaked in the blood flowing from Soorpanakha's nose) spat fire and asked, "Who has done this to you without feeling ashamed to maim a woman?" Soorpanakha replied, "Two humans in the garb of sages with bows in their hands have done this to me. They look like Manmatha. They are the sons of Dasaratha on the look-out for Rākshasās, to destroy them and uphold dharma. These two are not a bit concerned about your prowess. They have with them an attractive woman who cannot be compared to any other in all the three worlds. She is so beautiful that I am unable to describe her in words. After seeing her exceptional beauty, I tried to pounce on her and take her away for Rāvana. The two persons who were by her side became furious and severed my nose."

Looking at the ghastly sight of her wounded nose, which looked like a palm-fruit from which flesh had been dug out, Khara (who could make the world tremble) asked Soorpanakha to show him the persons who did this to her. He rose with a rage that could burn the seven worlds and said, "If they are humans who have done this to you, I will not be satisfied even if they are slain. Let my chariot be brought here." Even as he was shouting, fourteen Rākshasās looking like fourteen mountains were by his side. They told Khara, "Leave this task to us." These fighters possessed such strong arms that they could hold the world in their hands. They could wield all types of huge weapons from a mace to a disc. They were like Hālāhala poison in the form of Rākshasās. They asked Khara, "Are you going to fight the Devas? You are only going to deal with ordinary human beings. What are we here for? We would be unfit to live, if we left such a simple task to you and did not take it upon ourselves." Khara replied, "What you say is true. If I go to fight these men, the Devas will laugh at us. Kill these mortals, drink their blood and return to me with the attractive woman who is by their side." *The fourteen Rākshasās happily bowed to Khara their leader, and followed the shameless Soorpanakha who took them like a messenger of Yama towards the grove where Rāma lived.* She showed them the lotus-eyed Rāma, who was thinking of the flawless sacred feet of Lord Tirumāl of a thousand names. The Rākshasās shouted, "We will hurl the men to the ground!" "We will catch them in our hands!" "We will tie them with a long rope! Let us do as we have been told by our leader." Then they surrounded Rāma and Lakshmana. Rāma took his mountain-like bow, his sword, and the ever-full quiver of arrows and asked Lakshmana to guard Seeta. Leaving the hermitage, Rāma challenged the Rākshasās to a fight. They immediately responded with fierce weapons like axes, tridents and swords. Rāma with his sharp arrows perfectly aimed at all the twenty-eight huge shoulders, severed them from their bodies, and felled them to the

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ground. Again when they began fighting with their chests, Rāma's arrows cut off all their heads in the twinkling of an eye.

Soorpanakha rushed to Khara (screaming like a female elephant that had watched the killing of all the male elephants by a roaring lion) and narrated everything that had happened. Listening to Soorpanakha, Khara who possessed a might which could not be contained even by Lord Siva became so furious that it looked as though the blood in his body had boiled and come out of his eyes. Shouting loudly, frightening even fierce lions in their dens, Khara asked his assistants to get his chariot and a huge army ready. Immediately, roaring Rākshasās resembling the ebullient ocean waves seen during pralaya, were lined up with all types of deadly weapons. *From the ferocious look of the army, one could not say whether it was a mob of tigers, or a mass of clouds, or a herd of trumpeting elephants, or an array of huge mountains, or a pride of lions. Chariots drawn by yālis, lions, elephants, tigers, dogs, jackals, demons, horses, bulls, donkeys and powerful vultures, resembling a huge sea, came marching like the inexorable Yama.* The huge army wielding battle-axes, spears, swords, tridents, clubs, pestles, deadly nooses, daggers, thunderbolts, poles, sticks, bows and arrows, discs, fire-balls and javelins, had fourteen leaders with sixty lakh Rākshasās under every leader. Surpassing fire and sun, carrying weapons which had agonised gods and sporting garlands of victory, each one of the leaders had the strength of thousands of elephants and a wide mouth that could consume the world. They were protected by the boons received from Lord Brahma. They were all arrogant and held their heads so high that clouds settled on them mistaking them for mountains. The Rākshasās in the army had chests so broad that one could not measure their width with normal eyes, while their legs could measure the earth! In their innumerable battles with the Devas, these Rākshasās had invariably won.

The Rākshasās of Khara's army were capable of ordering even Yama to fall at their feet and were like fire incarnate. Possessing spears, and deadly nooses these Rākshasās had red hair and fierce eyes and teeth. *Even poison appeared white compared to them. The sight of them would strike terror in Yama as if they were Yamas come to snatch his life!* Wearing heroes' anklets and garlands, they protected their chests with armour. They were excited at the prospect of a battle. Their might matched their physical form. They were like mountain peaks, with none to oppose them in the three worlds. These Rākshasās had put to flight even Devendra riding his Irāvatam. With faces like those of elephants, horses, demons, monkeys, lions, bears, dogs, tigers and yālis, these

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Rākshasās possessed eyes resembling the Hālāhala poison that emerged from the ocean of milk. Some had eight hands while some others possessed seven hands. A few had seven faces with eyes that emitted fire and a few others had eight faces. They had strong legs and ate anything that came their way. They were in possession of articles snatched from the Yakshas, the Asuras and from fleeing Gandharvas. Flags, feathers, and canopies were spread without any gap, screening the sky and preventing the earth from getting any sunshine.

Fourteen leaders possessing mighty bows, swords and fierce teeth, and capable of removing even the Meru mountain, arrived from all directions with chariots drawn by horses, and a strong will to accomplish the task undertaken by them. Mighty Dooshana and Trisiras with their deadly spears which could consume the lives of ferocious horses, arrived with animals that roared like huge drums. In the midst of the ocean of Rākshasās stood the mighty-shouldered Khara in his chariot. Lofty columns of dust sent up by the army of rutting elephants, horses, chariots and infantry, made even Soorya's golden chariot (drawn by green horses) appear white, and filled the forests, the clouds, and the sea. The Rākshasās with their venomous minds filled the earth and the sky and covered the mountain-peaks. *With Soorpanakha leading them, like a fatal disease easily giving away the lives of these Rākshasās to Yama, the overflowing army approached the generous Rāma.* The twang of bows everywhere frightened and dispelled thunder, while the clamour silenced the sea, as the army approached Rāma and Lakshmana who were eagerly waiting to offer battle. The ferocity of the army frightened the birds and animals so much that they began to move fast with terrified looks and became 'messengers' to Rāma and Lakshmana, bringing the news of the arrival of Khara. With columns of dust coming in advance, with the sound of the breaking of twigs and trees by the footfalls of the soldiers, and with the fleeing of frightened yālis and lions, Rāma and Lakshmana realised that the Rākshasa army had arrived to fight with them. On sighting the army, the furious Lakshmana with his shining bow, sword and armour, told Rāma, "Please stay away from the fight; instead, watch me fighting." Rāma replied, "I have assured the sages following dharma and doing penance, that I would protect them. I shall therefore, on my own, destroy these Rākshasās! Please look after Seeta, the possessor of tresses with fragrant flowers."

Realising that Khara's army was very large and that it had destroyed the trees which were plentiful in the forest, Rāma wore his indestructible armour, tied on his quiver full of arrows and took up his bow and his sword. Lakshmana, however,

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persisted in his plea and told Rāma, "Should I tell you that I can this very day kill all those who come from this world or the celestial world? I request you to allow me to get rid of the lethargy of my shoulders by entrusting this battle to me." Rāma refused to concede. Lakshmana who was aware of the strength of Rāma's shoulders did not disobey him. Saluting him, Lakshmana stood beside Seeta whose flowing tears drenched the earth. While the creeper-like Seeta was depressed, Rāma came out of the hermitage angrily, like a lion emerging from a mountainous cave and confronted the ferocious Rākshasās. *Soorpanakha, out to destroy her race like a raging fire in a bamboo forest, pointed to Rāma and said, "This hero who is opposing us is Rāma, our enemy."*

Khara who could frighten even Soorya, told his Rākshasa army, "It is after all a mere man who wants to fight with us. It would be a shame to vanquish him with the help of our huge army which even this forest cannot contain. I shall fight and slay him single-handed and consume him as my food." Akamban a learned Rākshasa, however, told Khara, "It is good to be ferocious, but I see bad omens. Though the clouds above thunder, they pour out blood; a dull halo has encircled the sun; clusters of crows fight over your flag and fall on the ground cawing. Flies swarm the sharp edges of our swords. The left eyes and shoulders of our warriors throb. Our strong horses feel sleepy and fall on the ground. Jackals howl along with dogs. Female elephants give out rutting fluid, while the tuskers break their tusks. The world is trembling and heaven appears to fall down thundering. The smell of stale meat comes from the garlands of the Rākshasās. *Because of these bad omens, to dismiss Rāma as an ordinary man, is foolish.* Despite all your experience in fighting, this man is invincible. Please bear with me for what I say."

Khara laughed aloud and said, "Do you think that my strong shoulders, which have defeated even the Devas, cannot defeat a mere man?" This was a signal for the other Rākshasās. All of them shouted and surrounded Rāma like a herd of elephants surrounding a lion with a graceful mane. Rāma immediately bent his bow and shot arrows in rapid succession. As a result, galloping horses fell down wounded and elephants were brought down to the ground like mighty mountains levelled by huge thunderbolts. Rāma's arrows were so powerful that severed tridents, axes, swords, maces, flags, enemy shoulders, feet of elephants, axles of chariots, heads of yālis, and saddled horses and mountainous elephants, were all smashed. The arrows discharged from the bow of Rāma were innumerable; they were tens, hundreds, thousands and hundreds of thousands. These powerful arrows slew countless Rākshasās, whose

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bodies lay in heaps like huge mountains pierced by arrows. The whole forest was a sea of blood with Rākshasa heads floating all over. The headless corpses resembled burnt dry trees. Rāma's arrows went into the sky as if in quest of the Rākshasa lives going upwards. *These arrows (which were as fierce as the long eyes of women) severed the Rākshasa hands with swords, their necks, bodies, legs and flaming heads and cast them in the fields.* The forest land turned into lakes and rivers of blood, banked by heaps of mountainous Rākshasa corpses. Heads, flesh, hands, horses, bows and chariots with flags floated in that tidal sea of blood. The Rākshasās became furious and tried to attack Rāma collectively with their arrows. Even these were destroyed by Rāma who continued to kill the Rākshasās, creating mountainous heaps of black bodies with red hair.

Headless trunks danced; elephants were drowned in the flowing red hot blood; mighty fiends merrily fed on the bulky dead Rākshasās; and the heavens were filled by Rākshasa heroes slain in the battle. The black eyeballs of the Rākshasās (which used to frighten Garuda) were eaten by crows. The ease with which the Rākshasās were annihilated only showed that ultimately, there was nothing as bad as adharma and nothing as good as dharma for all beings. *With a rain of stones, several Rākshasās attacked Rāma who appeared like the sun that destroyed several thousand blocks of darkness. Rāma with his bow, speedily and totally destroyed the Rākshasās who attacked him irrespective of whether they shot arrows, or other weapons, or merely intended to use them!* The severed Rākshasa heads with shining ear-rings, were thrown into the sky, sea, star-studded firmament, fierce forests, mountains and on the elephants guarding the eight directions. Rāma's arrows pierced the strong Rākshasa chests (that had once scoffed at the strength of the Meru), came out, fell on the earth, hills, clouds and moon, went up into the sky and finally sank into the sea. Slain by Rāma's arrows the lives of the fierce Rākshasās reached the heaven of heroes, while their bodies were dragged into the sea by the flood of blood. Looking at this, the Devas shouted for joy. *Fiends bathed in tanks of blood full of 'lotuses' (Rākshasa livers), 'lotus leaves' (Rākshasa bowels) and 'crocodiles' (elephants).* With the continuous shower of arrows, some Rākshasās called for help, some collapsed, some were destroyed, some became shapeless, some felt sad, some rolled, some bathed in the sea of blood, some died on the ground and some others were torn apart.

The fourteen leaders of these huge armies that were being destroyed by Rāma looked ferocious like the Hālāhala poison. Equipped with chariots, these leaders

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possessed all types of weapons including swords, tridents, bows and arrows. Like the Tripura Asurās who had confronted Lord Siva, all of them now surrounded Rāma. They hurled arrows, spears, axes, mountains, sticks, fire, and even abuses at him. Rāma, destroyed the chariots of all these fourteen leaders in a moment. They jumped to the ground and shot arrows from their bows which Rāma, in no time broke. Having lost their bows, they tried to fight with huge boulders and mountains. *Finally, Rāma (who had crossed the ocean of all arts with his profound knowledge) arched his lethal bow as well as his eyebrows. Taking out fourteen fierce leaf-like arrows, he severed the mountains held by the fourteen Rākshasa leaders as well as their heads, and felled them.* Soon the rest of the Rākshasās encircled him with their weapons and cordoned him off on all sides. The loud beating of war-drums, the trumpeting of elephants, the neighing of horses, the blowing of conches and the thunderous uproar of the Rākshasās, was heard all over. Mighty weapons wielded by the Rākshasās were smashed into pieces in mid air. The Devas ran away to avoid the falling pieces. It was at this time that the powerful Rākshasa known as Trisiras with a shining sword and strong armour protecting him, confronted Rāma with furious eyes. Looking like a lamp in the midst of darkness, Rāma opposed the oceanic army of Trisiras with his equally huge 'army' of arrows. *These arrows shattered the Rākshasās' heads, shoulders, thighs, trunks and swords and even their hopes of killing him.* The array of arrows released by Rāma, did not spare the chariots, flags, elephants or anything that belonged to the army of Trisiras. Blood from the Rākshasa bodies flowed like huge red rivers.

Rāma's powerful arrows dispatched some Rākshasās to heaven from where these Rākshasās watched their own headless trunks still dancing in the battlefield. Some of the Rākshasās without even knowing that they were beheaded kept shooting their scorching arrows! Some others who rose into the sky showered their weapons on the ground, without knowing that they had lost their legs! The Rākshasās who went to Devaloka watched Rāma fighting all his foes single-handed, with disbelief. *The Rākshasa clan was annihilated by Rāma's arrows like the family of a person who tenders false evidence in a court is annihilated.* Like the worm that is transformed into a wasp by repeated stings, the wicked Rākshasās were transformed into Devas, by the sacred arrows of charitable Rāma. *The blood of the Rākshasās which flowed copiously like a river, carried their bodies to Lanka, as if they were messengers proceeding to inform Rāvana of the deadly deeds of a human (Rāma)!* All this was being watched by Trisiras. Unable to tolerate the havoc caused to his army, Trisiras lifted his chariot

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which was stuck in the mire of blood, flew into the sky and shot a rain of arrows at Rāma. Replying them with fourteen powerful arrows, Rāma shattered Trisiras' chariot and killed the charioteer. Not content, Rāma with his sharp arrows severed two of the heads of Trisiras along with their crowns, leaving only one head in position. Even after forfeiting his chariot as well as the right to be called Trisiras, the Rākshasa continued to shower a rain of arrows on Rāma who raised his eyebrows, looked at him and broke his bow, like a wild wind clearing the clouds. Though (the now single-headed) Trisiras lost his bow, he did not lose the glow on his face, nor his rage, nor his thunderous blustering. He began to pelt Rāma with stones and moved like a kite. As he fought with great fury from the sky it seemed as if two hundred Rākshasās were fighting together. With two fierce arrows, Rāma severed his legs; and with two more arrows, cut off his arms. Even then, the Rākshasā did not stop fighting. He tried to fall on Rāma and bite him with his cavernous mouth. *Finally with a powerful arrow, Rāma cut off the third head of Trisiras.*

Watching the mountainous body of Trisiras fall, the Rākshasās ran away from the battlefield. Some of them got their feet entangled in the huge bowels of dead Rākshasās lying on the battleground. A few of them tripped over the dead bodies of the Rākshasās. Some Rākshasās, seeing the chests of their colleagues pierced by heroic Rāma's innumerable arrows, avoided running in that direction. A few who ran with their swords, intending to disappear into mountainous caves, entered the gaping wounds of dead elephants! Dooshana accosted the Rākshasās who were running away from Rāma and said, "Do not be frightened of humans who are incapable of manly fight. Even women with bangles will not respect those who are cowards. The only arrow that can sustain you is courage, and not fear which ill befits a Rākshasa. Even when we fought Devendra and the Trinity of Gods, did any Rākshasa run away? Have you picked up the habit, of showing your backs, from the Devas? *Why are so many of you running away with your swords in your hands, frightened of a single man? Is it to enjoy the embrace of your women with exquisite eyes and breasts? Would you not proudly show them your battle scars instead of shamelessly showing them the wounds inflicted on you by the branches of trees while running away from the front? Rāvana, our leader has such strong shoulders that he cannot be defeated even by the Devas. His sister's nose has been cut off by this man, and you shamelessly retreat. Instead of leading the lives of heroes wielding swords, are you going to lead the lives of rich merchants or use your*

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swords and spears to plough the land? At least for some time stop running, and watch my archery."

Dooshana, along with his army, began to attack Rāma. The Devas who watched the fight became dizzy. Cautioning Dooshana to protect his army well, Rāma walked towards him. Soon, Rākshasa hands holding weapons were severed, elephants' mighty tusks were cut, chariots moving with the speed of wind and their horses were felled and the necks of horses were cut like sheaves of paddy by Rāma's arrows which sped in search of the foes, stripped their armour, shields and lives, and caused a river of blood. Special arrows known as Gangapatra entered the bodies of the Rākshasās and killed them. Yet another set of arrows with crescent-moon-like tips sundered the Rākshasās without even entering their bodies! While a few deadly arrows split the armour of the Rākshasās, their hearts were split by the arrows known as Pallam. The weapons hurled by the Rākshasās who stood beside Dooshana were all destroyed. Dooshana's huge army full of powerful and strong Rākshasās was annihilated. The Devas roared for joy. The river of blood, uprooted trees and mountains. Even Lord Yama was exhausted collecting the lives of Rākshasās killed in the battle! Dooshana was furious. He drove his chariot on elephants, and on the mountainous heaps of crowned heads and headless trunks. *It seemed as if Dooshana in his grand chariot drawn by twenty-five horses, voluntarily went with great difficulty in search of Yama, and stood before the mighty arrow of moon-like Rāma!* Looking with compassion at Dooshana who was standing with a bow in his hand (like a mountain in a chariot) Rāma commended his courage. Dooshana immediately shot arrows at the forehead of Rāma, who bore them like a mighty elephant. He smiled within himself and thought, "The speed of his arrows and the strength of his bow are commendable." Choosing deadly arrows, Rāma destroyed Dooshana's chariot, slew his horses, broke his bow and split his armour. The Devas roared happily. Sages from all the eight directions offered their blessings to Rāma. Finally, Rāma told Dooshana, "If you are really capable, try to protect yourself from this arrow." *Then he shot a powerful arrow. Dooshana lost his head with his fierce teeth.*

Hailing from a good Rākshasa family, Khara, with tusk-like teeth, watched the beheading of his brother Dooshana. He became furious. Like a cluster of clouds, he surrounded Rāma with a sea of elephants, horses and chariots. The fury of the evil Rākshasās accompanying Khara became uncontrollable. As if tearing the hoods

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of Ādisesha, they fought Rāma. Rāma's arrows made rutting elephants, horses drawing chariots, and the heads, shoulders, bows and legs of Rākshasās, tremble. The bows and shoulders of the Rākshasa horde were destroyed by his deadly arrows. When it could be said that the arrows selected by Rāma who was dharma incarnate could penetrate the stars, the lofty sky and the earth, is it necessary to stress that they passed through the bodies of the huge sword-wielding Rākshasās? *The arrows destroyed the Rākshasās with the ease with which the usurped wealth of the weak destroys the usurpers!* After the destruction of the Rākshasās, Khara stood alone in the flood of blood mixed with fat, like the Mandara mountain standing in the sea. With a burning heart and flaming red eyes, he came in a chariot, followed by vultures and crows, like a ship sailing on a sea. Even before Khara (looking like the pralaya fire) could approach him, Rāma began releasing select arrows. A thousand fast fiery arrows were shot by Khara. They were all intercepted by Rāma with similar arrows. Nine arrows deadlier than the pralaya fire dispatched by Rāma, were met by the bent bow of Khara. Resorting to māya, Khara began screening Rāma with a rain of arrows. Rāma bit his lip angrily and said, "I will kill this Rākshasa right now with a mighty arrow." *As Rāma pulled the string hard, the bow broke with a thunderous sound. Rāma was least concerned about his weaponless state. He simply extended his mighty hand behind him. Lord Varuna watching all this from the sky, understood and gave him, Parasurāma's bow which Rāma had earlier kept in Varuna's custody. Rāma took this bow in his right hand and held it in his left hand. Soon the left eyes and left shoulders of all those who forsook the path of dharma throbbed!*

In the twinkling of an eye, Rāma (frightening even Yama), strung his new bow and shot a hundred arrows reducing Khara's mighty chariot to dust. Having lost his chariot, Khara rose clamorously into the sky and showered a rain of arrows on the 'mountain' (Rāma's arm) holding the bow. Withstanding all these arrows, Rāma shot an arrow at Khara's right shoulder and felled it to the ground. Khara, with his left hand took out a huge pillar-like pestle and flung it at Rāma, who, however, got rid of it with a fierce scintillating arrow. Khara looked like a furious serpent which had lost its poisonous fang. He uprooted a tree and approached Rāma who shot an exceptional arrow. *Khara who had been Rāvana's right hand all these years, lost his neck and died.* The Devas danced and sang for joy. They showered karpaga flowers and screened Rāma. Having vanquished the enemy, Rāma stood shining like the sun which dispels fog from all directions. The sages came one after another and surrounded him. Rāma

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returned to Seeta who was all alone like a body without life. Lakshmana and Seeta, with their copious tears, cleansed Rāma's feet of the blood and dust from the bodies of Rākshasās. The blood that came from the wounds of Rākshasās flowed in all directions, while Rāma who was extolled by the Devas rested. *Soorpanakha, who watched the slaying of Khara, beat her belly. Embracing Khara's dark body, she rolled in the sea of blood and wailed, "I fell in love with Rāma. The desire for him should have ended with the cutting of my nose, and I should have died then and there. Instead, I have destroyed your life by my words. I am a treacherous woman." Like a storm which destroys a ship in the sea, Soorpanakha, whose goal appeared to be the destruction of the Rākshasa race, sped to the city of Lanka.*

7. SOORPANAKHA'S EVIL DESIGNS

Soorpanakha's infatuation with the mountainous shoulders of Rāma made her forget the fact that even powerful Rākshasās had lost their lives. She proceeded to Lanka with the thought, "I shall tell Rāvana of Seeta's great beauty." Let us describe the splendour of Rāvana when Soorpanakha entered his court! In that strong city of Lanka which had the sea itself as its moat, in a magnificent court, which even the eternal Lord Brahma the creator of all animate and inanimate objects in this transient world could not have created, Rāvana was seated in such a manner that he made the court-hall acquire grandeur by his very presence. Decorated with gems, this court had been constructed by the divine architect (Viswakarma) who had limitless expertise and who could do things as per his will. The court-hall was as faultless as benign dharma! Rāvana was seated in the court with his twenty shoulders measuring the sky and shining like the eastern mountain and with his ear-rings shining like twenty suns orbiting the Meru. His crowned heads neither bowed to the Trinity of Gods, nor to the most beautiful women with slender waists, heavy breasts, bamboo arms and red-rimmed eyes! With his gem-studded ornaments illuminating all directions and diamond-like mountainous shoulders appearing like the hoods of Ādisesha, Rāvana was seated in his court wearing an ornamental necklace which seemed to be made of stars and the nine planets! His hero's anklets jangled every time mighty kings bowed to him with their crowned heads. The heaps of flowers that the Devas and others showered around him were like the heaps of tributes brought by leaders from the three worlds competing with each other for his favour.

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Vidyādhara kings possessing crowns flashing with gems, not knowing when Rāvana would look at them, always kept their hands raised over their heads in a subservient attitude. Each one of the leonine Siddha chieftains who sat around him would humbly bend forward as if he had addressed them, though he had actually spoken only to his maids. Even when he said a good word secretly to one of his ministers, the Kinnarās surrounding him would be frightened. They would feel that he had given orders to punish them. He was surrounded by Nāgas from the nether world who looked at him with the fear of sinners looking at the frightening form of Yama holding a stick to chide them. The celestial minstrel, Tumbura, seated in the court, extolled (with the music of the yāzh) the prowess of his twenty shoulders which had subdued the eight regional elephants, lifted Mount Kailas and fought Devendra. Sage Nārada poured classical music with perfect rhythm filled with melody brought out from the strings of the veena into his ears. Varuna the lord of the seas, taking care not to drench the clothes of the women of the court resembling peacocks and deer, gently sprinkled fragrant water mixed with flowers from the world of the Devas and Vidyādharas on him. Vāyu, the lord of wind took care to sweep and take away the gems and pearls falling from the clashing crowns of the kings assembled in his court. Brihaspati the preceptor of the Devas and Sukrācarya the preceptor of the Asuras, would, with golden rods in their hands, escort Devendra and the Asuras and seat them in their assigned places. Even Yama the lord of death abandoning his weapons, performed the task of regularly keeping time in that court of Rāvana. Agni the lord of fire, performed the task of lighting the lamps with fragrant ghee, camphor and cotton wicks, as if creating a 'forest of lotuses' in a 'tank' (the court of Rāvana).

The perennial givers of gifts like Kāmadhenu and Cintāmani, stood one behind the other hoping to give Rāvana a pleasant surprise by catching his eye. The ear-rings and other jewels worn by him shone brilliantly, making everyone wonder whether there was night at all in the seven worlds and the eight directions! Celestial damsels with heavy bosoms that bent their slim waists, sprinkled rice and flowers with their crimson hands and extolled him. Watching the exquisite peacock-dances of Oorvasi and others (to the perfect beat of drums) and submerged in a sea of women with bow-like eyebrows and large black eyes, Rāvana who had done hard penance to bring the three worlds under his control, was majestically seated. *Such was the splendour of Rāvana, when his sister Soorpanakha with her red hands above her head and her red hair dishevelled, charged into Lanka's northern gate with blood dripping from her*

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breasts, with her nose and ears cut off and with her open mouth making a thunderous noise, louder than the roaring of the pralaya sea.

The Rākshasis of Lanka beating their breasts surrounded Soorpanakha and cried with her. They could not bear the sight of the sister of their king, the overlord of the three worlds, walking alone without her nose. The Rākshasās of Lanka, who were known for their pride, stared at Soorpanakha with fiery eyes, shouted loudly, clapped their hands and bit their lips. A few of them said, "Could this be the work of Devendra? Or could this have been done by any one of the Trinity of Gods?" A few others said, "None in these worlds would have dared to harm Rāvana's sister. Someone coming from a different world must have done it." Some others said, "What wonder is this? The moment she announced she was Rāvana's sister, all those who heard her would have fallen at her feet. Instead, she has been maimed. How could anyone do it? We cannot even think of that. Therefore, these wounds could only be self-inflicted." Some Rākshasās wondered, "Unable to fight Rāvana, Devendra became his servant, Lord Vishnu, after losing His strength, became a sea-dweller, and Lord Siva, stayed away. Who then could have done this?" A few other Rākshasās said, "This Soorpanakha who is born in a respectable family must have given up her chastity. Probably it was Khara who punished her." Some said, "This must have been done by those who have planned to put an end to the three worlds by arousing the wrath of Rāvana." "Perhaps this is the result of the penance of an angry sage," said a few others.

Lanka was all along accustomed to the sweet music of the mridangam, veena, yāzh, flute and conch. *For the first time, a sound hitherto unknown, the sound of wailing women was heard.* Several Rākshasis who came out of their houses saw Soorpanakha in tears. Out of great grief, they left behind their liquor-bowls as well as the hearts which sought such liquor. Holding each other, they fell (with a stream of tears) at the feet of their king's younger sister, Soorpanakha. On seeing her, the red eyes of some Rākshasis became redder. Women who were enjoying themselves on the swings suspended from tall arecanut trees, heard the wailing of Soorpanakha and came rushing to the streets. Women with dark eyes and no waists, shed dark cloud-like tears and rolled on the ground at the thought of what would happen to all of them as soon as invincible Rāvana came to know of the tragedy that had befallen his sister. There were some Rākshasis who shed tears and said, "Till now even animals in Lanka have not been subjected to this humiliation thanks to our powerful king, Rāvana. Some calamity is going to befall us soon."

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Soorpanakha fell and rolled at the feet of Rāvana like a cloud at the foot of a mountain. Those who were seated as well as those who were standing in Rāvana's court were frightened by this sight and sought their way out. The three worlds were plunged in darkness. The regional elephants ran away from their respective positions. The Devas hid themselves. Rāvana saw the state of his sister, Soorpanakha, and became furious. His eyebrows converged into his forehead in anger. His shoulders covered with ornaments grew in size. His eyes looked upwards and started emitting fire. The frightened Devas wondered what would happen next. Angry Rāvana, with his moustaches twitching, his sharp teeth flashing like lightning and with smoke emanating from all his ten cavernous mouths, roared like thunder and asked Soorpanakha, "Whose deed is this?" Soorpanakha replied, "Two men have come to the forest. They are the real rulers of the earth! They have no parallel either in this world or in the celestial world. These men did this to me with their swords." As soon as Rāvana heard this, his loud laughter spread to all the eight directions. With eyes emitting fire, he bellowed, "Even the strongest action of men will only be very ordinary. This must have been done by someone else. Stop telling me lies. Cast away your fear and tell me what exactly happened." Soorpanakha replied, "The men I refer to are as handsome as Manmatha. They have such strong shoulders that they can demolish even the mighty Meru. They can destroy the seven worlds in a second with the strength of their bows. How can I explain all this to you now? These men have great respect for sages. They have faces which resemble the moon in the sky. Their eyes, hands and feet resemble lotuses. Performing endless penance seems to be their task. They wear clothes made of bark. With sacred threads across their chests, they chant the Védas. *Steadfastly believing in truth, they do not fear you. They treat you like dust. They have ever-full quivers like the endless words inherent in the art of speech.* Can two Manmathas live in one world? Can there be any who is superior to these two men? Even one of them is adequate for comparison with the age-old Trinity of Gods. When great sages expressed their fear of us, these two solemnly assured them that they would destroy all the Rākshasās from their very roots. They are the sons of Emperor Dasaratha who ruled the entire world. They are absolutely without any blemish. They live in the forest to carry out the wishes of their father. *They are Rāma and Lakshmana."*

Rāvana who heard Soorpanakha was angry with himself. He said, "These lowly men who have severed my sister's beautiful nose with their swords are still alive. Even after this, Rāvana unashamedly preserves his life and his unused sword! After

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conquering the universe, I reign over the three worlds. What is the use? I have now lost all my fame. Even if I cut off the heads of all beings in the entire world, can I get back my lost fame? These men, who have brought me to this, are still alive and my sword is still with me. The years of life given to me by Lord Siva, and my shoulders, too, are there." Consoling himself, Rāvana said, "O mind, why do you falter in shame just because blemish has penetrated my body? Do not worry. To withstand this shame, I possess the strength of ten heads and twenty shoulders!" Looking at Soorpanakha, Rāvana asked her with a derisive laugh, "Did not Khara and others who were in that forest slay those two men who were unaided?" Beating her belly, Soorpanakha started crying again. Her tears flowed copiously while she said, "Khara and his relatives were slain by these men. As soon as they learnt from me of my fate, Khara and all the young and strong Rākshasa heroes went with great fanfare to punish them. The mighty Rāma with his incomparable bow dispatched all of them to the heaven of heroes within three nāzhigais (over an hour)." Rāvana's reaction was a mixture of anger and sorrow. Even before Soorpanakha's words entered his ears, like thunder from the clouds mixed with rain, his red eyes emitted fire out of anger and shed tears of sorrow. Casting away his sorrow, and with great fury like fire fed with ghee, Rāvana asked Soorpanakha, "What was the crime that you committed to make these men sever your nose and ears?"

Soorpanakha said, "My crime was because of a beautiful woman, who was by the side of that handsome Rāma who cannot be portrayed even by a great painter. *This woman who had left her abode of a lotus flower is so beautiful that she must have acquired her waist from lightning, her arms from tender bamboo and her complexion from gold!" Rāvana asked, "Who is she?" Soorpanakha continued, "Her breasts seem to be made of gold. This earth is fortunate to be touched by her sacred feet. Her name is Seeta. Her words are music to the ears and are as sweet as honey. Her hair is decorated with nectar-shedding flowers. She deserves to be worshipped as a divine lady even by the Devas. The lotus-born Lakshmi is not fit to be even an attendant of this woman. To attempt to describe her beauty is to exhibit one's ignorance. The words that come out of her, appear to be taken out of nectar. The locks of hair that curl in front, are like clouds. The tresses that flow behind her, resemble clouds that descend from heaven to give us rains. Her feet are like red cotton. Her fingers are like red coral. Though her face has the size and beauty of the lotus, her eyes appear bigger than the ocean. It is false to say that Manmatha died because Lord Siva opened His furious eye. Manmatha must have seen this beautiful Seeta with fragrant tresses, and suffering intensely from the pangs of love, he must have yearned for her and lost his life.*

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"No artist can paint Seeta whose eyes are sharper than the sword and the vél. Her beauty remains unequalled in the celestial world, in this world and in the nether world. Shall I describe the beauty of her shoulders? Shall I describe the shining swords moving on her face as eyes? Or shall I attempt to describe the beauty of the rest of her limbs? I do not have the ability to describe her beauty in detail. Will you not go tomorrow and see for yourself? Why then should I tell you of it now? If I say that Seeta's forehead is like a bow, her eyes are like the vél, her teeth are like pearls, her lips are like coral, I would have uttered mere words! Can they be like seeing the object? Can any simile be enough to convey the beauty of Seeta? If one says, 'A crop of paddy is like grass', will the comparison be adequate? Devendra has Indrani as his consort, Lord Siva has Umadevi and Lord Vishnu has Lakshmi. Similarly you, too, shall have Seeta. The unique distinction of acquiring a woman surpassing everyone else in beauty, shall only be yours and not theirs (Devendra and others)! O possessor of shoulders reaching the sky! Among the Trinity of Gods, Lord Siva places His consort Umādevi on the left side of His body; Lord Vishnu retains His consort Lakshmi in His bosom. Lord Brahma has His consort Saraswati on His tongue. Tell me Rāvana! If you are able to attain waistless Seeta (shining like the lightning emerging from the clouds), where will you place her and live? "

The moment you succeed in obtaining Seeta who lisps like a child, I know you will give away all your riches to her. There is nothing wrong in that. I am also aware that though you will love me for enabling you to get Seeta, I will become the enemy of all your sweet wives in the palace. This marvel of a woman known as Seeta was not born out of the womb of a woman belonging to heaven or this world. When the Devas and Asuras churned the ocean of milk, the lotus-born damsel Lakshmi arose. *To excel this act, the earth gave birth to this Seeta!* When you, with the prowess of your sword, obtain and enjoy this 'deer', the narrow-waisted Seeta with her tresses decorated with nectar-shedding flowers, please obtain Rāma for me to play with and enjoy. Whatever penance one does, one will attain what is sought only at the destined time and not earlier. Possessing ten heads, twenty eyes and shoulders, a handsome form and chest, the time has now come for you to obtain Seeta. With the object of bringing this exquisite Seeta for you, I went near her. It was then that Rāma's brother Lakshmana severed my nose with his sword. Though my life was finished then, I felt I should die only after telling you everything. Hence I came here."

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Rāvana's mind was bereft of his anger, heroism and 'righteous' indignation, like the exit of virtue where sin gets established! Like one burning flame merging with another, his lust mingled with his life. Except Seeta (described by Soorpanakha), Rāvana forgot everything else. He forgot Khara who was killed by Rāma; forgot the strength of Lakshmana who severed the nose of Soorpanakha and the consequent disgrace; forgot even the boons he had secured through his penance! For Rāvana, the name of the slender-waisted Seeta and his mind were no longer two distinct entities. They merged into one. He did not have another mind to sift or separate them, nor did he possess a way to forget Seeta. How can anyone vanquish lust without the help of enlightenment? Even before Rāvana could deceitfully imprison peacock-like Seeta in his Lanka protected by lofty walls, he had imprisoned her in his mind. As a result, his heart gradually melted like butter placed in the hot sun. The fever of love grew inside the five high-pitched senses of Rāvana like the sins committed by one who has discarded all the benefits of his learning, as the time for Lanka to suffer from hardship had come due to the strength of fate. *Manmatha who should normally have been afraid of Rāvana now acquired the courage to shoot his 'arrows' at him, because Rāvana, with golden Seeta entering his mind, lost his greatness and became small proving that lust had the strength to conquer everything.*

Rāvana rose from his throne. Soon, the seven worlds blessed him. Conches were blown all over and flowers were showered on him. All in the court departed. He entered his golden palace with his mind increasingly tormented by the fever of love. Avoiding his wives, he reached his huge bed which was spread with flowers. Steadily the fever of love spread throughout the body of Rāvana who was constantly thinking of the eyes and breasts of Seeta with fragrant tresses. His lust for Seeta increased a millionfold. As a result, the soft fragrant flowers on his bed were burnt. His body with its mighty shoulders shrivelled. He was in agony due to the raging fire inside him. When the maids offered cool sandalwood paste and soft flowers to him, Rāvana sighed like a hot furnace. Without realising that seeking another's wife was wrong, sinful Rāvana, who intensely desired to see the body of Seeta with her spear-like dark eyes, suffered acutely. The mighty protector and king who had once caused hardship to the regional tuskers by breaking their tusks, now pierced by the arrows of Manmatha like a tree bored by the humming bee, suffered helplessly. "A beautiful woman with her tresses full of konrai flowers has entered my heart and is staying there," thought Rāvana; and then he lost his nerve. As if beset with difficulties, he rose

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in anger against thenral with the fragrance of jasmine, that struck him like the arrow of Manmatha. Rāvana left the place in distress not knowing what to do, and reached a nearby grove preceded by countless damsels carrying lamps. Inside that grove where the flowers from the tall gem-like trees touched the stars, Rāvana, suffering from the fever of lust, reached a milk-white bed laid in a golden hall. Swans, intoxicated by consuming the nectar dripping from fruits and flowers, along with sweetly lisping parrots, nightingales and other birds, observed silence fearing that the king of Lanka would be angry if disturbed. When the seasonal cold breeze entered the wounds caused by the arrows of Manmatha, Rāvana's anger was roused. As soon as he asked, "What is the season that is going on now?" the cold breeze disappeared out of fright and the breeze of spring came in. When even the cold winter breeze was like burning fire for Rāvana, need one talk about the effect of the breeze of spring on him? Even that burnt him. *For those who have consumed the poison known as love, what effective medicine is there? After all, one's happiness and sorrow are determined by one's inward feelings and not by external factors!*

The fever of love that arose in Rāvana spread in all the eight directions. Finding even the season of spring too hot, Rāvana furiously asked, "What is the season that has arrived here now? The earlier season was better. Let the rainy season be brought in!" Accordingly the rainy season was ushered in. Even then Rāvana's sturdy shoulders suffered from intense heat. He shouted, "Does the rainy season also create so much heat? It is no different from the earlier winter season which hurt me." His slaves pleaded, "Lord! Do we have the courage to disobey your orders?" Rāvana immediately ordered all the seasons to depart. Whereupon, the seasons without doing their respective tasks, behaved like yōgis, by severing themselves from their actions. *The whole world was transformed into a seasonless and timeless celestial region.* The world which had so far been functioning in a set pattern, ceased to be either cold or warm. Still Rāvana's body burnt without the help of even ghee and fire. *Except character, what force is there that can cool a harsh fire raging inside one's body?* When Rāvana found that not even rain-bearing clouds, sandalwood paste, tender lotus-buds and flowers, could cool him, he told his servants, "It is said that the moon has a cooling effect. Run and beckon him at once." The fierce Rākshasās looking at the moon (who, fearing Rāvana's wrath, did not have the courage to move even above the city of Lanka), told him, "Our king is calling you. Come fearlessly." *Like a king who, taking advantage of the time when his strong foe has lost his strength, comes forward happily*

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to take away his life, the moon arrived. The praiseworthy rays of the moon that spread everywhere tormenting him, were like Mahāvishnu's fatal disc hurled at an appropriate time. *To the red-eyed Rāvana, the cool nectarous rays of the moon, (pouring down on him) were nothing short of molten silver right from the fire. Like the flame of an invincible enemy, they seared him.* He who could frighten even Yama, roared at his servants, "I had asked you to bring the cool moon. Who brought the poisonous destroyer, the hot-rayed fiery sun?"

The frightened servants said, "Do we dare do what is not ordered by you? O king, "It is the moon. He has come in his vimānam. The red-rayed sun comes only in a chariot." Rāvana, who was so far unaware of the nature of the fever of love caused by a beautiful woman, now realised it was the moon (the enemy of the lotus) that had arrived. To prevent his life from being taken away, he told the moon, "O leader of the stars, while your body is white, your heart is black. Leaving aside your natural coolness, you burn me with hot rays. Have you also, like me, become the victim of listening to the description of a beautiful woman? I am weak as there is no one who can pull out the arrows of Manmatha stuck in my body. Who will save my life? Vanquished by Jānaki's lotus face with lily-black eyes, you have become lean, your heart has become black and you have begun to burn. Can you achieve victory by displaying jealousy? Should you not be humble, knowing your weakness?" After uttering several words in agony, Rāvana told his servants, "Send away the moon and the night. Let the sun and the day which were there earlier, be summoned." Even before he could finish speaking, the moon and the night departed. In a moment, the great sun and daylight appeared scorching him like the sacrificial fire. *While the red lotus flowers bloomed, the nocturnal flowers were suppressed like the ill-gotten wealth of the mean-minded, which suddenly disappears. When the sun (the jewel of the world) rose in the east, the moon disappeared in shame into the horizon along with his wife (the night), like a fleeing king on sighting a mighty emperor.* Rākshasis sleeping with their husbands on beds spread with flowers, embraced them with their arms and continued their love-play unaware of the premature dawn of day! Some of them were like bodies without their lives when their husbands suddenly leave them. Their eyes shedding tears, resembled the black lily shedding nectar. Some Rākshasis sleeping on soft flowery beds and pillows went on clasping their husbands (after spending the night with them in the sport of love) with their flowery hands.

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The sudden sunrise and the falling of the sun's rays on them and the humming of the bees around their cheeks, failed to disturb the elephants which were sleeping like drunkards. Even though there was plenty of ghee in the lamps of all the mansions, they lost their lustre (like good wives who were separated from their husbands) by the premature appearance of daylight. Flowers that normally bloom in the morning did not open their petals. Resembling the eyes of the sleeping women, they remained closed like the doors of misers! *The abrupt appearance of the day made the Cakravaka love-birds happy at the sudden termination of their separation, like virtuous ones released from their cruel prisons. The falling of the rays of the sun through gem-set windows, awakened the Rākshasis from their pleasant sleep. These women were as bemused as those unable to see truth clearly. Astrologers and roosters slept on without waking up, unaware of Rāvana's command.*

Looking at the sun, Rāvana told his servants, "Even he scorches me like my mind and the fire. He must therefore be the same old moon who burnt me earlier." The servants replied, "O lord of universal wealth, this is not the moon. It is the sun whose rays burn unlike the rays of the moon." Rāvana immediately cried, "This sun in the sky is more treacherous than poison. Send him away! Let the crescent moon be brought." Immediately, the full moon changed into the crescent moon of the third day after the new moon, showing what great things the power of Rāvana's penance could achieve! Seeing the crescent moon in the western sky, the wicked Rāvana said, "This is the submarine pralaya fire, or the shining poisonous fang of Ādisesha, or the evening sword that has appeared to slay me. Probably this is why Lord Siva keeps this crescent moon on His matted hair! This lightning-like object which is a miniature form of the thunder-like full moon who ran away after trying to take my life, does not seem to be less harmful. *Can the venom of a smaller cobra be less poisonous than that of the bigger one?* The sun appears to be better than this crescent moon. Send away this moon which does not spare even me from torment." *Soon the crescent moon disappeared and a stony darkness, which could be sliced into pillars, set in. The darkness was worse than the darkness seen in the minds of those heartless ones who are impervious to the light of knowledge!* Looking at the darkness spread throughout the world, Rāvana said, "This is like the Hālāhala poison swallowed by Lord Siva." Thinking of Seeta's form, Rāvana would say, "While I do not understand what this darkness is, I see a bright full moon with dark hair and ear-rings. *In this young woman's form, I see all features including the poisonous eyes, except her waist.* This woman has entered my

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mind bit by bit. Unable to see me love sick she must have searched for me and come here. I have not seen a woman like this in all the seven worlds. Could she be the one described by my sister, Soorpanakha? Let me ask her and find out whether the form I see is that same Seeta described by her." Then he ordered his servants to fetch his sister at once.

The servants went at once and brought the lustful Soorpanakha who had undertaken the mighty task of annihilating the entire Rākshasa race! Rāvana asked her directly, "O woman, is this peacock-like damsel with sword-like eyes standing before me, that Seeta mentioned by you?" Soorpanakha replied, "That one with red lotus eyes, a red fruit-like mouth, handsome mighty shoulders, a broad garlanded chest who looks like a mountain of collyrium is the archer Rāma." Rāvana replied, "You senseless woman! The form I see is that of a woman. The form you describe is that of a man not conceived in my mind. How dare these humans play pranks with us experts in sorcery?" Soorpanakha said, "The beautiful form of Seeta has been imprinted on your mind which now refuses to move in any other direction. Wherever your eyes move, Seeta is seen by you. For those who are steeped in lust, such an experience is age-old." Rāvana said, "Let what you say materialise. Now tell me, why is Rāma always seen by you?" Soorpanakha replied, "Ever since the day he caused this agony to me I have not been able to forget him." Rāvana said, "What you say is true. I am now suffering from the fever of lust. My limbs are withered. How do I get out of this sorrow?" Soorpanakha replied, "You are an incomparable leader of the whole world. Why do you grieve? Go forthwith and bring that Seeta."

Soorpanakha left the place. Rāvana lost his strength and his power to think. If the fury of Rāvana did not kill those who stood near him, it was only because their time had not yet come. Behaving as if he had got back his lost life, he told his servants, "Ask the celestial architect to construct a hall of moonstone that can continuously sprinkle cool water." The architect instantly arrived and created a hall with a thousand pillars, making even Lord Brahma feel ashamed. The moonstones were so expertly placed that there was a continuous sprinkle of nectar-like cool drops even in the absence of the moon. Windows were so made as to let in the fragrant breeze of thenral. There was a grove of cool karpaga trees around the hall. Celestial beauties with shining golden jewels, holding gem-set lamps, dispelled darkness, as the twenty-shouldered Rāvana arrived in a ruby-studded chariot to see

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the hall. *The darkness which seemed to be created by millions of nights, was chased away by billions of moons (the bright faces of women).* The dazzling light emanating from the flowers (made of nine gems) of the karpaga trees, converted night into day even before the sun rose. Rāvana's five senses went awry. *He lost direction in life and entered the newly created hall like a soul entering a new body after death.*

Rāvana reached a bed covered with tender yellow twigs and cool fragrant flowers (with bees humming pleasantly) as if reaching the ocean of milk as bountiful as a mother! Thenral, the southern breeze, considered a life-giving friend of even those who are in the throes of death, arrived with the fragrance of the hair of women, like nectar emerging from a beautiful grove. The moment this pleasant thenral entered through the window, the fiery-eyed Rāvana felt as if a python had crept in. Boiling with anger, he asked his servants, "How could Vāyu, subordinate to me, let in this thenral without my permission? Bring the guards immediately." As soon as they were brought, the cruel Rāvana with rolling eyes asked them, "Who allowed this thenral to enter this place?" They replied, "The practice all along was to allow free entry of thenral. It had never been forbidden." Rāvana shouted, "Even the Devas come here only after knowing my mind. My writ appears to have now been destroyed by this thenral. Go to the boundaries of all the directions, catch hold of this thenral and imprison him. No purpose is served by my getting angry with Vāyu. Even Yama will consume my life if that Seeta with her spear-like eyes does not have compassion for me. Bring my knowledgeable ministers to tell me what I should do." Even before a syllable was uttered by Rāvana, the servants hastened and brought the ministers. Some of them arrived in chariots, some on horseback and some others on elephants. The sages and celestials became agitated. Rāvana who could accomplish whatever he wished, was now confused. After consulting his ministers and analysing things properly, he got into his celestial chariot and went all alone to see his uncle, Mārica!

8. MĀRICA SLAIN

When Rāvana arrived, Mārica became nervous. Welcoming Rāvana with due honour and looking at his ten faces, the fear-stricken Mārica asked him, "O ruler who can frighten Devendra and even Yama! What is the purpose of your coming like a commoner to my abode in this forest?" Rāvana replied, "With great hardship and effort

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I have borne all that I can. My beauty and greatness have along with my fame, disappeared. How can I explain to you the cause? Even the Devas would scoff at what has happened to me. Some humans have gained strength and have, with their swords, severed the nose of your niece Soorpanakha. Tell me what greater shame can befall my race and yours. The mighty bow of a man has cut short the life-span of my brothers Khara and Dooshana who fought with him angered by the insult meted out to Soorpanakha. While such great shame has befallen us, you have been folding your hands in meditation without concern. Though my anger is not mitigated, and I feel as if I have lost my life, I do not want to fight with those humans because they are not my equals. I have decided to abduct the creeper-like woman who lives with them. I have come here to seek your help to achieve this."

Rāvana's words caused great agony to Mārica, like molten metal poured into his ears. He cast away his fear, closed his ears with his hands and spoke in anger, *"O king! You are inviting death. You have lost your senses. What you have said has not come from you. This is prompted by your fate.* My advice will be unpalatable to you. Even so, I offer it because it will do you good. O Rāvana! You attained all glory and wealth only after doing severe penance, after burning your heads with your hands in the sacrificial fire, and torturing yourself by severe fasting. If you lose all this wealth due to your folly, can you ever get it back? O great Védic scholar, do you through sinful deeds, want to give up all that you have earned by virtuous means? *One who occupies the country of a friend, one who by unlawful means collects more than what is due by way of tax and one who abducts the wife of another, will be destroyed by the god of dharma.* Is there any sinner, who has escaped destruction? Devendra was infatuated with the beauty of Ahalya and suffered severe hardship after being cursed for his sinful deed. Several persons have had their downfall like Devendra. Many women like the crimson Lakshmi are with you, enjoying your wealth. The words you have uttered show that you have lost your power to think. Even if you attempt to execute your plans, nothing pleasant is going to happen. You will only be punished for your sins. *If by any chance you do succeed, your entire race will be annihilated by Rāma's arrows which will be as effective as the curses of sages.*

"What is the use of advising you? Do you not know that Khara by himself has greater prowess than your entire army? Even he along with his sturdy chariot and army was destroyed by that solitary archer Rāma, whose goal now is to kill all the Rākshasās. Is there anyone as heroic as Virādha? Even he was dispatched to heaven

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by Rāma. Who amongst us can survive his arrow? Constantly thinking of this, I am already depressed. You cause me greater agony now by unfolding your plan to attain Seeta. Nothing can be done about those who have died after committing sins. All that you can do is not to repeat those sins committed by the dead. There have been innumerable rulers in this world who have ruled one after another. How can I tell you their number? Of these, how many have prospered after giving up virtue? Rāma possesses that great bow with which he shot arrows and killed my younger brother Subāhu and my mother Tātakai. When I think of Lakshmana who is always with Rāma, my strength disappears and my heart trembles. Now, when I see that the person whom you are antagonizing is that Rāma himself, I am more concerned. You ought to know that neither objects at rest nor objects in motion last for ever. Accept my advice. Do not even think of mean acts. Live for ever in glory."

Rāvana became furious. With his eyebrows going up and his eyes emitting fire, he told Mārica, "Without understanding what happened, you say that my handsome shoulders and the hands which lifted Lord Siva with Mount Kailas will be vanquished by an ordinary human. You have thereby insulted me. You have committed a grievous offence by praising those who cut off my sister's nose; and I tolerate your behaviour." Unmoved by treacherous Rāvana's growing fury, Mārica told him, *"Your anger can only be against yourself and your race and not against me.* You boast of your prowess in holding Mount Kailas on your hand. Do you not know that it was Meru-like Lord Siva's bow (mightier than Mount Kailas) that was handed over to Rāma for stringing, and it was this bow which Rāma effortlessly broke in two. You have not understood the wisdom, capacity or other great qualities of Rāma. *Even before you get ready for battle, Rāma will wipe away a major portion of the Rākshasa army. You seem to be under the impression that Seeta whom you covet and seek is a feminine form. Do you not know that the sum total of the sins committed by the Rākshasās, has created the form of Seeta to destroy all of them? My heart, fearing for your safety beats like a drum.* You will not be allowed to escape and remain alive with your kith and kin, if you abduct Seeta. Should someone like me, standing near those who are about to consume poison unwittingly, encourage them? Is it proper? Know that countless weapons which can annihilate all the worlds, the weapons presented by Lord Siva and others and the weapons given by sage Viswāmitra, are impatiently awaiting Rāma's command. You are afflicted by the poison known as lust which will destroy you. Born before you as your uncle, I have advised you. Give up your sinful intention."

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Treating Mārica (who offered wise counsel) with contempt, Rāvana said, "I should not have considered you (who are hiding here from one who slew your mother) fit to oppose a heroic man. Can the sons of Dasaratha defeat one like me who has conquered all the three worlds? What can be more pleasant for me than to come across someone who is fit to be my adversary? *Giving advice to a king is the duty of ministers who protect him. It is none of your business.* Apply your mind to what I say and do my bidding. If you disobey me, I will cut you up with my sharp sword and do what I propose to do. If you want to live, stop uttering words which I detest and do as I desire." *Rāvana's attitude subdued Mārica. He mused, "Is there anyone more arrogant than one like me, who thinks he can change an arrogant person?"* Like water which gets absorbed when it falls on molten copper, Mārica's anger dissipated. He said, "I expressed my thoughts only because of the good they might do you and not because of my fear of death. For one whose end is near, even good things appear harmful. *Tell me what I should do."*

Rāvana got rid of his anger. He stood up, embraced Mārica and said, *"O possessor of mountainous shoulders! If I do not attain Seeta, I will be killed by the burning arrows of Manmatha. Instead, is it not laudable to die of Rāma's arrows?* Therefore, go and get me Seeta who has made even the pleasant thenral my enemy." Mārica replied, "I had once gone to Dandakāranya in the form of a deer along with two Rākshasās to avenge the death of my mother Tātakai. Rāma's arrows killed those two, while I returned out of fright. Please speak out what you want such a Mārica to do now." Rāvana said, "I have made up my mind to slay Rāma who so easily took your mother's life. Is it proper for you to ask me what you should do? Obtaining Seeta for me by your māya, is all that you have to do." Mārica replied, "O king! Henceforth what is there for me to say? However, to take a queen by deceit, instead of displaying your valour, is a mean act. Therefore defeat Rāma in battle, enhance your heroism and obtain Seeta. That alone can be an act of dharma." Rāvana laughed at Mārica and said, "Do I need an army to defeat these humans? The sword in my mighty hand alone is enough for that. But, if Rāma and Lakshmana die, will not Seeta give up her life?" Mārica thought, "It is a pity that I have no way of conveying to him, that even before he goes near Seeta, his heads will be severed by Rāma's arrows. Who is there to tell him what providence has ordained? There is nothing that I can do now except obey him." Turning to Rāvana, Mārica asked, "What act of māya do you want me to perform?" Rāvana replied, "Transform yourself into a golden deer and create a longing

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for you in that golden woman." Agreeing to do so, Mārica left the place, while Rāvana the possessor of a shining spear went by another path.

Knowing the strength of the bows of Rāma and Lakshmana, Mārica did not want to appear in his natural form. Accepting the command of Rāvana, he decided to appear in the guise of a deer. He knew his life as well as the lives of those close to him would shortly be destroyed by Rāvana's actions. The thought of Rāma and Lakshmana, made Mārica shiver. *When water in a deep pond gets polluted, the fishes inside are certain to die whether they are in the pond or come out to the land for safety. Such was Mārica's state which none can describe.* On two earlier occasions, once during the yāga of Sage Viswāmitra and again in the Dandaka forest, Mārica had escaped death at Rāma's hands. Now for the third time, Mārica went to where Rāma was, as if trying to get killed by him! In the form of a bright lightning-like golden deer, which had no peer in heaven or earth, Mārica entered the forest in search of the exquisite doe-like Seeta. Like lustful men succumbing to deceitful prostitutes, all the deer in the forest herded with overflowing emotion behind the golden 'deer'. Seeta was moving about in the garden gathering flowers with her tender hands decked in bangles. She walked, hurting her slender waist making outsiders comment, "Does this woman have a waist at all?" As those about to suffer ill luck see strange things in a dream, Seeta, destined for uncommon suffering , saw a strange and uncommon thing in real life, namely the illusive deer. Because Rāvana's life-span was nearing its end and also because the eternal dharma had finally arrived in this world, Seeta desired the deer; and it became the *root* cause of the annihilation of the Rākshasās.

Seeta did not realise that the deer she saw was illusory. When it stood before her, she had an overpowering desire to possess it. "I will tell Rāma to catch it for me," she thought, and sped to Rāma. With folded hands she told him, "A shining deer looking like a ruby all over, with a golden body and strong ears and legs, has come here. It deserves to be acquired and enjoyed." Without hesitating, Rāma said, "Let us go and see it." Lakshmana intervened and said, "A deer with a golden body and gem-set legs and ears, is an unnatural one. It is an illusive deer. How can such a deer be taken for a real one?" Rāma replied, "Brother! Even experts cannot know everything in this changing world. *Animals like this are not unusual in this world where billions of species are in existence. What prompted you to speak thus?* We know of weird animals. Have we not heard of the seven swans* of golden hue? There is no rule that

* *According to mythology, Sage Bharadwaja's seven sons had acquired the form of seven swans.*

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an animal should have a particular appearance or should die in a particular manner." Seeta intervened and said, "By the time you finish arguing, the deer will disappear." Respecting Seeta's feelings, Rāma asked her to show him the deer and went with her. Lakshmana who could not bear this, followed them. *Like inscrutable fate, the deer stood before the three and stared.* Rāma looked at it and said aloud, "This is a fine deer, indeed!" *The import of the words spoken by the all-knowing Rāma could easily be discerned when it is realised that Lord Mahāvishnu had after all come here leaving His serpent-bed as a result of the good fortune of the Devas.* Rāma told his brother, "Look at it. Can anything be compared to this deer which has only itself to be compared with? Its beautiful tongue flashes like lightning when it falls on the tender grass; and its body has the colour of red gold, while its spots look like silver. Is there anyone — man or woman — who would not be attracted by this beautiful deer? Even the creeping or flying creatures will melt and succumb to it like moths falling in front of a bright light." Lakshmana however was clear in his mind that this was not a natural deer. He told Rāma, "Even if what we see here is a golden deer, what do we gain by it? Let us therefore return to our grove." Before Lakshmana could finish his words, the beautiful Seeta told the handsome Rāma, "O son of the emperor, if you catch and give me this captivating deer, it will bring us solace in this forest. We could play with it whenever we are depressed."

Rāma assured the slim-waisted Seeta that he would catch and bring the deer for her. Lakshmana who could instantly realise what was happening, persisted, "Dear lord, you will finally find out that this is an illusive deer sent to us by the cruel, deceitful Rākshasās." Rāma (born to remove the hardship of the Devas) said, "If as stated by you, this is an illusive deer, I will slay it with my arrow; we will subsequently slay the fierce Rākshasās and finish our duty. If, however, this is a real deer as I believe it to be, let us catch it. Tell me which of these two is bad?" Lakshmana said, "We do not know who is behind the act of sending this deer. It is not laudable to indulge in the sport of hunting, which has been shunned by the great and the pious since ages." Rāma replied, "It is ridiculous to give up our resolve to destroy the Rākshasās just because they are numerous, or they resort to māya. It is good to catch the deer." Lakshmana said, "Is it not good to accomplish proper actions after proper thinking? *Even if there are several enemies behind this deer, I shall kill all of them with my powerful arrows and pursue it. If this is a real deer, I will catch it and bring it here."* Just then swan-like Seeta, lisping like a parrot and using nectarous words,

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looked at Rama and said, "My lord, are you not going to get me this deer by yourself?" Then, shedding pearly tears, she went into the hermitage in a huff.

Seeing Seeta's temper, Rāma told Lakshmana, "I shall go, catch the deer and return fast. Till then, protect Seeta who is like a peacock moving in a forest." Rāma took up his bow and arrows that could humble even spears, and was ready to leave. *Lakshmana told Rāma, "During Viswāmitra's yāga, out of the three (Tātakai, Subāhu and Mārica), Mārica alone escaped. I fear that this deer is that Rākshasa. You will know this after some time. Let nothing untoward happen!"* After bidding Rāma farewell with folded hands, Lakshmana kept watch outside the hermitage into which golden Seeta had entered. Ignoring the sound advice of thoughtful Lakshmana and thinking only of the anguish of Seeta (looking like the full moon), Rāma smilingly went after the deer. The enchanting deer which was walking slowly step by step, suddenly pricked up its ears. It stared as if out of fear. Striking its chest with its legs, it started jumping and running. Suddenly it ran so fast that it seemed as if it could teach the wind and the mind to move. *Rāma chased the deer, with the feet with which as Trivikrama he had once measured the world, making one wonder whether there was another world to be measured.* Except to say that Rāma by his speed showed his omnipresence, none could measure the speed with which he ran! The deer would get to the peak of a mountain and leap towards the clouds in the sky. When chased, it would run fast; when Rāma slowed, the deer would slow down. Rāma felt, "This deer is peculiar. Lakshmana realised it. Had I stopped to think, I would not have come chasing it. Only the sorcery of the Rākshasās made me come running all this distance."

Mārica understood that Rāma would no longer attempt to catch him and he would soon be dispatched to heaven. He therefore leapt into the sky with great speed. Immediately, Rāma took out a red arrow that was as ruthless as Mahāvishnu's disc, and commanded it to follow Mārica and take away his life. The leaf-shaped dart soon pierced the heart of Mārica who instantly called aloud and crashed to the ground like a hillock. The sound was heard in all the eight directions and Mārica fell dead on the ground in his real form. Standing near Mārica, Rāma realised that this was the body of that Mārica who had come during Viswāmitra's yāga. *Thinking of Lakshmana who had asked him not to go after the deer, Rāma said, "My brother is great! My brother, who is my very life, is great! Lakshmana born after me, to protect me, is great indeed. This wretch of a Rākshasa called aloud in my voice. Timid Seeta will be sad on*

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hearing it." Rāma was, however, comforted by the thought that Lakshmana had already known that this was the deceitful Mārica. "Lakshmana is also aware of my prowess. Therefore he will reassure Seeta. This Mārica has not come just for dying. The words which he has uttered indicate that a calamity will befall us. Before it does, I should rush back." With thoughts such as these, Rāma sped towards the hermitage.

9. RĀVANA'S TREACHERY

Having described what happened at the place where the sea-blue, Rāma went after the deer, let us unfold what happened to the creeper-like Seeta at the hermitage. The moment Mārica's loud cries were heard by her, she fell like an injured koel falls from a tree. Beating her belly, she became unconscious. Like a creeper that had lost its prop, like a snake rattled by thunder, she rolled on the earth with dishevelled hair and cried, "By wanting the deer, I have become the cause of the death of my husband, of my only support being taken away." Then she looked at Lakshmana and said, "How is it that you still stand here after knowing from the voice we heard, that faultless Rāma has fallen as a result of the deceitful act of the Rākshasa?"

Lakshmana who knew the real state of Rāma, explained to Seeta, "Is there anyone in this world who is stronger than Rāma? It is only because of your femininity that you believe that Rāma of superlative strength has been destroyed by a Rākshasa. O great lady, can the mighty Lord of this entire universe covering seven seas, fourteen worlds and seven mountains, be vanquished by feeble wretches? Even the five basic elements will lose their characteristics the moment Rāma becomes angry. Who do you think that cloud-like lotus-eyed Rāma is? And why do you weep? Will Rāma ever lose to a Rākshasa in battle and seek the help of others? If it happens, the whole universe with all the planets will go upside-down and split into pieces. Even Lord Brahma and the rest will be destroyed. For the sake of marrying you, Rāma broke the powerful bow of Lord Siva. How can mere words describe Rāma's prowess which has no parallel in the whole universe? Just as Rāma can protect everyone else, he can protect himself, too. If Rāma were to be afflicted, all the three worlds would be annihilated; celestials, sages and all others would be destroyed; and along with them even dharma would disappear. What more can I say? After chasing the illusive deer, the great Rāma would have shot an arrow. The moment it attacked the Rakshāsa who was in the form

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of a deer, he must have lost his strength and uttered the loud cry you heard now. Do not grieve; Stay here without fear."

Seeta became furious. She felt as if she was being killed. Boiling with rage, she told him, "Staying here, instead of proceeding to help Rāma, is not dharma." With harsh bold and brazen words, she added, "Even those who have moved with friends just for a day, would give their lives up for them; whereas, you (a younger brother of Rāma) still stand here unaffected though your elder brother is about to die! The only course open to me is to take my life by falling into fire!" Lakshmana (the possessor of a protecting bow) fell at the delicate lotus feet of Seeta who was about to fall into a forest fire like a swan entering a forest of red lotus flowers. He asked her, "Why should you die? I dread your words. I will not disobey you. Cast away your sorrow. I, your slave, will go at once as desired by you. Do we possess the strength to defeat harsh and furious fate? You ask me to disobey the orders of Rāma. After I leave, you will be alone." With a burning heart, Lakshmana took leave of Seeta. He felt extremely sad thinking, "If I stay here, Seeta will fall into fire and die. If I leave her and go to Rāma, there will be a disaster. *Born to suffer from this hardship owing to my sinful birth, I have no choice except to go courageously.* Through dharma alone, can destruction be averted. If any evil should occur after my departure, only Jatāyu the king of vultures can, to the best of his abilities, protect Seeta." *With such thoughts, the great Lakshmana followed Rāma's path as a result of the penance performed earlier by the Devas!*

The moment Lakshmana left, the cruel Rāvana, who was waiting for just this, arrived at the hermitage. Taking the form of a sage, he held in his hand the triple staff, a symbol of conquest over the three enemies namely lust, anger and delusion! He appeared emaciated like one who had walked a long distance after fasting. He was reciting the musical Sāma Véda with such perfect rhythm that it sounded like music from the veena. Treading with caution as if he was stepping on fire or flower petals, and with his hands trembling, he appeared so old that even old age was disgusted. His back was bent as if he was accustomed to sitting inside the hollow of a tortoise shell. With the sacred thread on his chest, he approached the hermitage of innocent Seeta, who was like Arundati. Attacked by the arrows of lust, Rāvana looking exhausted, reached the entrance of the impeccable hermitage and asked falteringly, "Who is inside?" Taking him to be the possessor of a faultless mind and penance, peacock-like Seeta in a sweet voice asked the sage to enter. Sweating profusely like a rutting elephant giving out rutting fluid, and floating in a sea of greed with waves of lust,

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Rāvana saw Seeta, the queen of chastity. *Looking at the koel-voiced Seeta who was more beautiful than all the divine damsels, the shoulders of Rāvana waxed; again they waned because of his inability to attain her!* To say that his eyes became intoxicated with the sight of Seeta's beauty (like bees after consuming nectar from flowers) would be inadequate. It would only be proper to compare his intoxicated eyes with the intoxication of his heart. Rāvana thought, "Are my twenty eyes enough to enjoy the dazzling beauty of this damsel who has come out of the crimson lotus, her abode? What a pity I do not possess a thousand unblinking eyes! *The three-and-a-half crore days of life that I have secured through my penance are not enough for me to play in the shoreless ocean of this woman's beauty!* Let me live serving this great woman for the rest of my life, making her the queen of all the three worlds, ensuring the obeisance of the Devas, Asuras and their wives for her. *Even when she is sorrowful and anxious, her face is so dazzling. I wonder how beautiful her shining face would be during her happy moments, with her teeth partly seen through a smile? I will present my kingdom to Soorpanakha who discovered this damsel with lovely tresses for me."*

As deceitful Rāvana's lust grew with such thoughts, the chaste Seeta, wiping her tears welcomed him and offered him a seat made of cane. He sat on it after placing his triple staff by his side. *Mountains and trees, witnessing this ghastly scene, shivered. Even birds kept silent. While animals were frightened, serpents went away with shrunken hoods.* The seated Rāvana asked Seeta, "Whose abode is this? Who is the sage here who is doing great penance and who are you?" Seeta with her large eyes thought, "This guest is new to this place and appears to be innocent." She replied, "The one who stays here is King Dasaratha's son. Fulfilling the wishes of his mother, he is staying here happily with his brother. You must have heard his name." Rāvana said, "I have heard of him, but not seen him. Once I had been to that land (Kōsala) where River Ganga flows. O damsel with sword-like large eyes, you seem to be spending your youth in this forest. Whose daughter are you?" Chaste and pure Seeta replied, "O faultless sage, I am Jānaki, the daughter of King Janaka who worships none but sages like you. I am the wife of Kākutsthan (Rāma)." Seeta asked him in turn, "You appear to be very old. You seem to be tired after traversing the difficult forest terrain. From where have you come?"

Answering Seeta, Rāvana said, "There is one who is known as Rāvana. He has vanquished even Devendra. Rāvana's beauty cannot be painted. A descendent of Lord

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Brahma, he is the ruler of all the worlds including Devaloka. He possesses a tongue that can recite the four Védas (Rig, Yajur, Sāma and Atharva). The might of his shoulders is such that he once tore the base of Mount Kailas and reduced the tusks of the regional elephants to powder. His greatness is beyond words and the Devas wait upon him. He is in possession of riches like the celestial karpaga tree. He stays in the golden city of Lanka surrounded by the sea. This faultless terrestrial city is superior to Devendra's heaven and the nether world. Lord Brahma has granted him an everlasting span of life. His hands hold the sword given by Lord Siva. All the planets have been imprisoned by him. Free from harshness, he has a noble character, great knowledge, and a judicial temperament. He is more handsome than Manmatha. Sages like us worship him as our lord because he possesses all the greatness of the Trinity of Gods. Beautiful women from all the worlds seek his favour. Though Rāvana knows they are all after him, he is not interested in them. He is in search of a damsel worthy of his mind. I had gone with the purpose of spending only a few days in the city ruled by this great Rāvana; but I stayed there for long, unable to leave him. I have come from there."

Seeta told Rāvana, "You are one who would consider even this body as redundant! What prompted you to stay in the city of the sinful Rākshasās who despise the Védas and sages and kill and consume human beings? You did not choose to live with great sages who do penance in the forests, nor did you think of going to cities abounding in water where noble ones stay. You have done wrong by staying with the Rākshasās who never even think of dharma!" Rāvana replied, "O damsel with a moon-like face, knowledgeable ones told me that the fierce Rākshasās were rid of their evil characteristics. Hence I did not fear going to them. If we examine them deeply, the Rākshasās are not at all bad, unlike the Devas. Indeed, to persons like me, the Rākshasās are much better." Not realising that the Rākshasās could acquire any form they desired, the innocent Seeta said, "By mingling with sinners, the virtuous cease to be virtuous." Rāvana feared that Seeta suspected him. Wanting to remove her suspicion, he took a different line and said, "What can those who live in these three worlds do except act according to the wishes of those strong Rākshasās?" *The noble Seeta did not relent. She said, "My charitable husband who protects dharma will wipe out the entire race of evil Rākshasās before he completes his penance here. Thereafter the world will be rid of sorrow."* Rāvana said, "O damsel with fish-like eyes, if ordinary humans can vanquish and destroy the mighty Rākshasās, a tender hare can destroy an elephant and a deer can kill a lion which has sharp claws!" "You do not seem to have

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heard at all of the furious Virādha or Khara and his innumerable Rākshasās succumbing to the arrows shot by my husband," said Seeta and started shedding tears thinking of the hardship Rāma went through. She added, "The lion you referred to is my charitable lord himself. The herd of deer is the Rākshasā horde. You will come to know soon, the manner in which the Rākshasa clan will be annihilated and how the gods will be elevated. Can sin vanquish indestructible dharma? What a pity that you have not realised this!"

Though Rāvana swelled with joy, when Seeta's sweet words (like nectar and honey) entered his ears, her assertion that Rāma and Lakshmana were stronger than the Rākshasās made him furious. He said, "You have glorified the destruction of weaklings like Virādha and others by a man. You will very soon realise that this is not a great feat, when the breeze of Rāvana's twenty shoulders destroys your hero, like squeezing a flower. Even breaking the Meru, or tearing the canopy of the sky, or churning the ocean, or putting out the submarine fire, or lifting this world can be done by Rāvana easily. You woman of words! Who do you think Rāvana is? What is there that is difficult for him?" *Seeta shot back, "Just because one has several shoulders for offering protection, can they mean strength? This Rāvana was imprisoned by Kārtaveeryārjuna the possessor of a hero's anklets, whose forest of shoulders was destroyed by the axe of young Parasurāma of two shoulders."* The moment Seeta said these words, Rāvaṇa's eyes began emitting fire. Huge shoulders appeared all over. The crowns on his heads touched the sky. The clapping of his hands sounded like thunder. His teeth clattered with the onset of his anger and his deceitful form of a sage disappeared. Seeta was frightened. "He is not an ascetic who has discarded good and evil. Then who is he?" she wondered. At the same time, Rāvana became furious like a poisonous cobra with its hoods spread. Can there be greater distress than the distress of Seeta (who was already in grief fearing for Rāma's safety) when she saw the transformation of the sage into a Rākshasa? Seeta could neither reply, nor escape from Rāvana. She shivered as if she were confronted by Yama. Rāvana told her, "Without considering my heroism which made the Devas do my bidding, you extolled the strength of humans who lead the worthless lives of worms. You are saved because you are a woman. Otherwise I would have crushed and swallowed you, and then killed myself out of my infatuation for you."

Rāvana continued, "O dear swan, tremble not! I will bear you pleasantly like a crown on each of my heads which have never bowed to anyone so far. You can happily

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live with the wealth of the fourteen worlds under my reign. I will make the innumerable celestial women sit at your feet and obey your commands." Seeta shut her ears with her tender hands and said, "You Rākshasa! What despicable words you address me with. I am the chaste wife of Rāma the possessor of a fierce bow! *You are like a cur seeking to consume the oblation meant for a yāga! Will I destroy my noble character afraid of losing my life which is as ephemeral as the dewdrop on the tip of a blade of grass?* If you wish to remain alive, run away and go into hiding before Rāma's lightning-like arrows strike you." *The heartless Rāvana replied, "Your husband's arrows falling on my chest which has broken the tusks of the regional elephants, will be like flowers falling on a mountain. O beauty of beauties, I pine with the malady of excessive love for you. Grant me life, by carrying out my wish. You will then attain heights which not even a celestial woman has ever reached." Speaking thus, Rāvana, of shoulders stronger than mountains, prostrated himself at Seeta's sacred feet. Exquisite Seeta who was patience incarnate, was aghast as if a blood-stained sword had fallen on her. She called aloud, "O my lord! O Lakshmana!"*

Rāvana remembered Brahma's curse, that if he (Rāvana) touched a woman against her wish, his heads would break into pieces. The wicked Rāvana did not therefore touch Seeta. Instead, with his pillar-like arms, he dug out the earth for one yōjana around the hermitage, transferred the whole mound onto his chariot, and ordered his charioteer to speed up. Seeta felt that her soul had left her body and fell unconscious as if hit by lightning. She rolled like a creeper scorched in a raging fire. She became depressed and shivered. She screamed in agony, "O god of dharma! Save me!" Seeta cried aloud addressing all objects around her and said, "O mountains, trees, peacocks, nightingales, deer, elephants! All of you, please go and search for my husband Rāma of unfading strength and tell him of my plight. O clouds, groves, celestials living in the forests! You know where my heroic husband is! Will you lose anything if you assure me that you will tell him of my predicament and save me? O my lord, giver of boons to all who seek! O Lakshmana! You who can annihilate the Rākshasa clan with a rain of arrows! Will you not come here now? O faultless Bharata! O Satrughna! Should you attract blame by not coming here and helping me when I face danger?" Turning to River Gōdāvari, Seeta said, "You are endowed with pleasant qualities. You are a mother to all terrestrial lives. Your mind is clear. Will you not go to my husband and tell him of my pathetic state? O mountain-pools and lions in dens! I see all of you

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before me. Will you not make Rāma smash the twenty shoulders of Rāvana and heartily laugh at the sight?"

Rāvana, who was destined to slash his own span of life, looked at Seeta who was wailing aloud and ridiculed her. "O lady with golden ornaments and ear-rings! Will these men kill me in a fight and save you? Do try!" Rāvana loudly clapped his hands and laughed at Seeta. She replied, "You created an illusive deer, drew away my husband (a Yama who would have consumed your life), entered the hermitage and then carried me away. If you can protect yourself from him in a fight, stop your chariot right here! After learning that your Rākshasa crowd was killed, and your sister's nose was severed by these men, you avoided a fight with them out of fear and indulged in this deceitful act. If you were a real hero, would you have done this?" Rāvana said, "The strength of my shoulders which lifted Mount Kailas would be insulted if I fought with these weak men. In fact I felt deceit would be more rewarding." *The doll-like Seeta replied, "Fighting foes, appears to be a shameful act for you, while cheating chaste women is an exhibition of strength. For heartless Rākshasās, nothing appears to be a blameworthy act!"*

10. JATĀYU'S DEATH

Jatāyu the king of vultures appeared before Rāvana and shouted, "I say, where are you going? Stop!" With words that impeded Rāvana's progress, with eyes emitting furious fire, and with a beak shining like lightning, Jatāyu came (as if the very Mount Meru had come flying through the sky) with the fury of pralaya. As a result, the trees bent, the clouds soared into the sky, and the earth and the hills shook. Even the cobras with shrunken hoods began hiding out of fear, thinking that the fierce Garuda himself had come. The sky and the forest (with elephants, yālis and everything else) were blown about by the strong winds generated by him. "You have placed the wife of noble Rāma in your chariot along with the earth. But where can you go? I will occupy all the directions in the sky, without allowing you to proceed anywhere," threatened Jatāyu and spread his wings. With red legs and head and a crimson neck, Jatāyu's body was white like Mount Kailas. Relieved that Rāvana had not touched Seeta, he told her not to fear. Controlling his anger, he said to Rāvana, "You have brought your clan and your life to ruin. Why did you do this act which will destroy you? Leave Rāma's wife alone and save yourself. If you do so, you will not die. You fool! You have committed a grave crime. *Who do you think Seeta (a noble mother to this huge world) is? She is no ordinary mortal. You senseless fellow! There will be none to support you after you decide to harm this universal mother!* Do you not know that Rākshasās like

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Khara and others, who were your kin, were slain by Rāma, and were offered as a morsel of food to Yama? You have tried to counter the fierce elephant which has come to kill you, with balls of mud! Knowing that strong poison will end your life, do you hope to see yourself alive after consuming it? Devendra, the Trinity of Gods, Yama, and all others, the moment they see the archer Rāma, are frightened like deer on sighting a tiger. There is no crime more heinous than that committed by you now, which will annihilate you along with your race. As a result of this act, you will suffer hell after your death. You have lost your capacity to think. *Incomparable Rāma and Lakshmana transcend all the celestials. The two are a part of the age-old divinity that has brought forth even the Trinity of Gods!* Because of your madness, you have indulged in this act. All the boons received by you from Lord Siva and all your sorcery will be effective only till that truthful Rāma dispatches his arrows at you. Once he comes here to fight with his bent bow, you will not be able to withstand his attack. Therefore, I shall myself save Seeta and leave her with Rāma. Go! Run and save your life." With his red eyes emitting fire, with his lips curled, Rāvana stared at Jatāyu and said, "Do not allow your words to run riot any more. Show me quickly those persons you have extolled now, you arrogant vulture! Flee from here before my arrow leaves a gaping wound in your chest. *It may even be possible to retrieve water 'sucked' by red hot iron; but this sweet Seeta cannot be retrieved from me."* On hearing Rāvana, swan-like Seeta's grief doubled. Jatāyu consoled her saying, "Mother, do not shed tears because Rāma has not arrived with his bow. *You will see the cluster of Rāvana's ten heads thrown as sacrificial offerings to the ten directions which he claims to have conquered."*

Making a thunderous noise by flapping his huge wings, Jatāyu with his clamorous beak pushed down Rāvana's crowns, broke his flag and earned the encomiums of the Devas. Rāvana, whose prowess was never put to shame like this, laughed furiously with his blood-shot eyes. Frightening the seven worlds, he bent the mountain-like bow in his hand as well as his eyebrows, and shot a rain of arrows simultaneously. A few of these arrows were shrugged off by Jatāyu's wings; a few others were broken by his sharp claws, while the rest were pulverised by his beak which was like Mahāvishnu's disc. Resembling Garuda of fiery eyes harassing several serpents simultaneously, Jatāyu with his strong long beak approached Rāvana, plucked his ear-rings, and flew upwards. Soon Rāvana shot fourteen arrows at Jatāyu's chest. When all of them flew astray without making any impression, Rāvana shot several more. Watching this, the Devas sighed heavily fearing that Jatāyu might die. As blood was overflowing from his body, Jatāyu rose into the sky, discharged the blood and became white again. Heaving a furious sigh,

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he pecked Rāvana's twenty shoulders, punctured them with his claws, hit them with his wings, and broke his armour covered by a garland of pearls. When Rāvana shot a hundred arrows at Jatāyu's broad chest, the Devas were scared. But, undeterred, Jatāyu made the same Devas applaud him, by snatching Rāvana's bow with his beak. Flying into the sky with the bow, Jatāyu appeared like a cloud with a rainbow! *Who can describe by words the strength of the shoulders of that great Jatāyu?*

Rāma, the son of Dasaratha (Jatāyu's friend), had earlier broken the bow of Lord Siva! Whereas now, Jatāyu took the bow of Rāvana the vanquisher of Devendra, and broke it with his legs. Rāvana, capable of destroying the whole world, was furious when he saw this. He hurled a trident which was like Lord Siva's arrow which had burnt Tripura. "Do not think Jatāyu has no strength to face your weapon. You will see it now," cried Jatāyu. The Devas roared for joy and exclaimed, "Who can show such valour?" The trident touched Jatayu's chest and fell, unable to succeed in its objective, like penniless men who seek to enjoy women who only go after gold, or like guests who enter houses to be welcomed by ladies and find none there, or like a beautiful woman's overtures to an ascetic. Before Rāvana could take up another weapon, Jatāyu sliced the head of his charioteer and threw it at his face. Furious, Rāvana took up an oft-used golden mace and hit Jatāyu with it. Sparks of fire flew, and Jatāyu fell to the earth like a mountain. Rāvana instantly raised his chariot into the sky and drove it faster than the speed of vision. The soft-natured Seeta suffered as if a flame had entered a painful wound. Watching the agony of that tender creeper-like Seeta, Jatāyu told her, "O swan-like woman! Do not be drowned in a sea of sorrow. Do not fear."

Breathing heavily, Jatāyu soared high and shouted, "Now where will you escape?" Snatching the golden mace, he jumped onto Rāvana's chariot, and with his beak attacked the sixteen horses drawing it. This fight made even Yama's hands tremble. *After destroying the chariot, Jatāyu seized and threw away Rāvana's quiver which was useless (as the worthless wealth of misers) in the absence of his bow.* Jatāyu then pounced on Rāvana and hit his chest and shoulders with his wings. Rāvana swooned and fell on his side. Jatāyu ridiculed him and asked him if that was the limit of his strength. Rāvana became furious. Realising that he had no more weapons to hurl at Jatāyu and vowing to slay him immediately, Rāvana removed the unerring sword known as Chandrahāsam from its scabbard, and attacked Jatāyu with it. *Though Jatāyu had never so far yielded to the prowess of Rāvana, the time for his end had come, because of the divine nature of the sword given by Lord Siva. It acted like Devendra's*

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Vajrāyudham and severed the wings of Jatāyu who fell down like a mountain. Seeta who saw this, shivered! The frightened Devas ran away. The sages felt as if they had lost their divine mother. The denizens of Vaikuntham showered golden flowers on him.

Rāvana's riotous roar rent the sky. Seeta was like a deer caught in a net and did not know what to do next. Full of grief, she fell like a creeper that had lost its supporting staff. She cried aloud, "The strong king of vultures who volunteered to come and help me is down. Who is going to help me now?" *Wailing like a female nightingale that had lost its mate, Seeta said, "Should the good Jatāyu (who gave me courage) be vanquished? Should Rāvana who deserves to go to hell win? Contrary to the assertions of the Védas, should dharma lose in this world? O exquisite Rāma and Lakshmana who left listening to this shameless woman's words! Come and see Jatāyu, your father's friend, a touchstone for all people of virtue. While it was my duty to protect my chastity, I have brought disgrace to the bow of my victorious husband and to my home. O Emperor Dasaratha in heaven! Will you embrace your friend, Jatāyu, who has completed his duty here of treading the path of dharma?"* After watching the helpless wailing Seeta and also the condition of the wingless Jatāyu, Rāvana placed the mound of earth, along with Seeta, on his shoulders and coursed through the sky. The speed of treacherous Rāvana traversing the sky, made the chaste Seeta dizzy, and she fell unconscious on the floor of the hermitage. Jatāyu in the mean time partially regained his senses and saw Rāvana carrying Seeta away in the sky. Depressed, he said, "My sons Rāma and Lakshmana have not yet come here. The god of fate, instead of giving me the glory of saving my daughter-in-law, has removed the fence that was guarding dharma. I wonder what is going to happen now? Had the victorious Rāma and Lakshmana been here, would this calamity have befallen slim-waisted Seeta, the wearer of golden bangles? I do not understand what has happened to them. Could all this be due to the deceit of Kaikeyi? Rāma is the incarnation of Lord Mahāvishnu who cannot be vanquished by this furious Rāvana. Realising this, Rāvana resorted to deceit. I am certain my son, Rāma, will redeem his honour after destroying Rāvana and his clan. Rāvana will of course be afraid to touch Seeta because of the relentless curse of Lord Brahma." Talking thus to himself, Jatāyu mused, "Probably Seeta by now must have reached a prison from which she will not be able to come out." *Jatāyu was again relieved that though he had lost his mighty wings and lost his capacity to fight, Seeta's chastity would never be lost. Blood flowed copiously like a river from his body where his wings once were. The feeling of shame that he could not save Seeta from Rāvana, and his great affection for Rāma and Lakshmana made Jatāyu weak and semiconscious.*

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Rāvana, afraid to touch the body of Seeta, took her expeditiously to Lanka and imprisoned her in the Asōka grove, under a simshupa tree in the midst of Rākshasis.

Let us now describe the state of Lakshmana who left at the bidding of Seeta. Thinking of her loneliness, Lakshmana became heart-broken. He was like Bharata when the latter left Rāma in the forest and proceeded to Ayōdhya. Moving with great speed like a ship on a sea with helpful waves, Lakshmana happily saw the handsome Rāma who looked like a dark cloud blooming into a lotus grove. Lakshmana, too, was seen by the lotus-eyed Rāma who was distressed at the possible concern of the peacock-like Seeta, shaken by her feminine nature on hearing the shouts of Mārica. Rāma thought, "The manner in which Lakshmana has come here shows that without realising that the cry of the loud-mouthed Mārica was a false one, the sorrowful and ignorant Seeta would have spoken harsh words to him and he (ignoring his earlier assertion that it was a deceptive deer) must have come to me in a depressed state, disobeying my orders to protect Seeta. I wonder what has been ordained by fate!" While Rāma stood with such thoughts, the heroic Lakshmana fell at his feet. Raising Lakshmana and embracing him, Rāma asked, "Why did you come here?"

Lakshmana said, "Seeta became tense with grief when she heard the unnatural harsh cry. I told her that it was the cry of Mārica. Without listening to my words, she became panicky. In a fury, she asked me to go and find out the cause of the cry despite my assuring her of the strength of your arms. Threatening to immolate herself if I did not leave, she got ready to run into the big forest in search of fire. Accused of deceit by her, I feared that if I did not leave, she would not desist from killing herself. Hence I came." Rāma thought aloud, "Preventing Seeta's death is difficult now. Lakshmana's words of assurance have not been accepted by her mind because of its confused state. The unprotected hermitage will soon be struck by some evil. These deceitful acts were only attempts to separate her from us." Rāma told Lakshmana, "You are not to be blamed. Listening to the weak-minded Seeta, it was I who decided to go after the deer to make her happy. You stopped me, warning me that it was an illusive deer. *My decision to follow the deer, ignoring your advice, has ruined me."* Expressing his grief repeatedly, Rāma who was never before unnerved thus, looked again at Lakshmana and said, "What do we gain by standing here? There is no way we can be relieved of our anxiety unless we go and see that bird-like Seeta with the voice of a nightingale." Traversing the long distance with the speed of an arrow, Rāma and Lakshmana reached the grove where golden Seeta *was* when they had left.

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Rāma, who had run all the way to Pancavati, could not find Seeta who used to adorn herself with flowers from the grove. *His shock was like the experience of a fine soul which has temporarily left its body and finds the body missing when it wants to return to it.* He was dazed like someone, who, after burying all his wealth under the ground in a mud pot, finds that it has been stolen by a thief. *When Rāma's mind whirled, the earth, the great mountains, the thoughts of the sages, the seven seas, the sky, the Védas, the eyes of Brahma, the sun and the moon — all whirled.* All objects in the world feared what the outcome of Rāma's fury would be. They wondered whether the noble Rāma would direct his fury against dharma, or virtues, or the useless strength of the Devas that failed to protect Seeta, or the sages who did not guard her despite being near by or the great sins committed by the fierce Rākshasās. The tall blue-complexioned Rāma became so furious that countless objects in the world exchanged their positions in disarray, fearing the total destruction of Lord Brahma's creations.

Lakshmana told Rāma, "We see chariot tracks in the mud here; we also see the place occupied by Seeta dug out and carried away as if somebody was afraid to touch her. Having seen these marks, what is the point in our standing here and worrying like weaklings. Let us follow the person who abducted Seeta, before he goes too far." The impeccable Rāma agreed, and the two took their bows and quivers and followed the chariot's long tracks which included the mountains and trees damaged by it. *At one stage, the tracks disappeared and it was clear that the chariot had risen into the sky.* Suffering acutely as if a thorn had entered a blister caused by fire, Rāma told Lakshmana, "Dear brother, what can we do now?" Lakshmana replied, "O lord possessing strong shoulders, what use is there in standing like this? We know that the chariot has gone towards the south. The sky traversed by the chariot is not beyond the reach of our arrows." Rāma agreed with Lakshmana. They proceeded southwards for two yōjanas. There they saw a flag, with the symbol of a veena fallen on the earth as if struck by a hurricane. At first they thought that a fierce fight must have taken place between the Devas and those who tried to carry Seeta away. Later, Rāma realised that the flag must have been broken by the sword-like beak of Jatāyu. With tears welling up in his lotus eyes, Rāma told Lakshmana, "It looks as if our beloved father Jatāyu must have come here with great speed and fought with all his might. The innumerable years of life that he has crossed, would have made him weak."

Lakshmana said, "If Jatāyu had put up a fight, it would indeed have been excellent, because none can match his prowess. Though I am certain that Jatāyu can keep the enemy at bay for the whole day and save Seeta without anybody's help, it would be

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better if we went and assisted him instead of standing here and thinking of several things." Rāma readily agreed and began moving around the place with the speed of a whirlwind. *Then they came across a powerful and fierce bow, broken and fallen on the earth. On seeing this, Rāma said, "Lakshmana! This bow that has fallen here looks like the mighty mountain used by the Devas for churning the ocean of milk. It has been broken by the beak of that great Jatāyu shining like the moon. Just imagine how valorous he is!"* Rāma and Lakshmana after a while, came across a mighty trident and two huge quivers full of arrows fallen like two mountains and were amazed. When they made further progress, they came across the shattered pieces of the huge shining suit of armour belonging to Rāvana. As the two brothers proceeded, they saw a dead charioteer, a great deal of flesh and a number of bows, all strewn on the ground and also innumerable ear-rings embedded with emeralds, as if the sky had fallen on the earth. Amazed and frightened by the scene, they trembled. Rāma said, "Dear brother! There are a number of jewels, ear-rings and crowns scattered here. Our fatherly Jatāyu, who has lost his youth, must have courageously fought single-handed, with several leonine persons." Lakshmana, the lion born to Sumitra, replied, "Though there are signs of innumerable shoulders and innumerable heads involved in the fight, I do not see signs of as many feet. It could only be Rāvana, with his twenty shoulders and ten heads, who dragged Jatāyu this far."

Listening to Lakshmana with respect, Rāma carefully looked around. His eyes suddenly fell on Jatāyu immersed in a pool of blood like the Mandara mountain immersed in the sea. On seeing Jatāyu, tears trickled from Rāma's red lotus eyes. He fell on Jatāyu's body and lost his senses for a while. It was as if a dark mountain had fallen on white Mount Kailas. Fearing that he was unconscious, Lakshmana took him in his arms and sprinkled pure water from the clouds on him. *Rāma got up, slowly opened his eyes and said, "Are there any in this world who are responsible like I am for the death of their fathers? One father, Dasaratha, has already died because of separation from me. Dear Jatāyu, the other father lies dying! O father, are you now dying only to help me?* Having sinned, I have become a Yama to my two fathers! O motherly Jatāyu! You have discharged your duty by coming here unaided to protect Seeta, my wife! What do I expect here and suffer for, when I have no relatives in this forest? Unable to prevent the calamity that affected Seeta and you, am I not as good as dead? The only reason why I still carry the burden of this life is because I promised the sages that I would protect them. I stand here like a useless tall tree, which is of no benefit to anyone. I do not in the least wish to continue this despicable life. My wife

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whom I should have protected has been carried away by someone; and he is alive even after killing you; for what am I in possession of this mighty bow and innumerable arrows? I stand here helplessly incapable of punishing the enemy who (with the strength of his weapons) killed you (my father) in the presence of Seeta the wife of this sinner carrying a bow. Who is there in this world as 'laudable' as I am?" While the incomparable Rāma along with Lakshmana was wailing in sorrow, Jatāyu slowly revived. He breathed with pain and looked at them both. *Seeing Rāma standing by his side, Jatāyu shed his sorrow and was happy as though he had regained his lost wings and got back the seven worlds. He said, "I am rid of my blemish. O blessed ones, I am now going to rid myself of this body. I am able to see you at this fag end of my life because of the good deeds done by me. Please come near me." After drawing them close to him, Jatāyu kissed their heads again and again with the beak with which he had shattered the crowns of Rāvana.*

Jatāyu then said, "My instinct told me that Rāvana's arrival here was only to commit a deceitful act. But how is it that you two who are so capable left the beautiful peacock-like Seeta, who is as chaste as Arundati, all alone and went away?" As desired by Rāma, Lakshmana explained in detail and in proper sequence all that had happened after the arrival of the illusive deer. Listening to him Jatāyu felt it was better to avoid hurting their feelings and uttered only soothing words to them. He said, "Can we, by any spectacular action prevent what providence has already ordained for us? Without accepting the fact that the grief experienced by us in this life is the result of the wrongs done in our earlier births, can we conquer fate even with all our intelligence? Misfortunes overtake us, only to remind us that things happen as already destined. On such occasions, it is foolish to allow our minds to get perturbed. What is there that is impossible for that relentless fate which took away one of the five heads* of Lord Brahma Himself? Can sorrow or happiness be prevented if they are fated to come? Was not that great Lord Siva who burnt Tripura forced by fate to seek alms with a skull? *Can an eclipse of the sun or the periodic waxing and waning of the moon be prevented?* O mighty Rāma with handsome shoulders, the process of people experiencing something bad and then something good has been going on since ages due to that relentless fate! It was this insurmountable fate that prompted Brihaspathi to curse Devendra and make him suffer unthinkable hardship. Devendra was saved by

** According to mythology, Lord Siva is credited with plucking one of Lord Brahma's five heads because He dared to compare Himself with the former.*

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the strength of the shoulders of your father, Dasaratha. *Dharma that was discarded by the Rākshasās, and the hardship caused by them to the Devas, are the twin causes that have brought you into this predicament of being separated from that sweetly lisping parrot-like Seeta.* May you therefore succeed in the task of wiping out the Rākshasās who indulge in deceitful battles."

Narrating the events that had taken place, Jatāyu said, "Along with the earth, Rāvana lifted that beautiful Seeta and started moving . I fought to the best of my ability and tried to prevent him from proceeding. He destroyed me with the sword that he had received from Lord Siva. This is what happened today." As soon as Rāma heard Jatāyu's words, his red eyes began to bleed and he started breathing heavily. His eyebrows steadily went upwards. His anger was so intense that the frightened sun and the planets began moving helter-skelter. Cracks appeared in several worlds. Mountains collapsed. Rāma's mind started spinning in anger. As a result, the mighty mountains, the sea, the wind, the sun and the moon, the celestial world, and also Lord Brahma the creator of the universe, started spinning. *The truth that 'all things are a part of Rāma', was established on that day.* The whole universe became nervous, wondering on whom Rāma's anger would fall. Giving out a harsh laugh that was like sparks of fire mixed with smoke, Rāma said,"O Jatāyu, you fought Rāvana who was carrying away the lonely, helpless Seeta, and attained this sorrowful state. When you were fighting him alone, the Devas in all the eight quarters neither stopped him, nor did they help you. Now you will see me destroying all these celestials simultaneously." *Rāma was so furious that he swore, "You will see the stars falling from the firmament, the powdering of the rays of the sun, and the raging of fire in this huge world. You are going to watch the destruction of the five elements and all moving and static objects. You will also see the annihilation of the seven worlds above and the seven worlds below in a moment; and the burning of everything inside and outside the boundaries of the eight directions of this world. They will all disappear like bubbles of water."* As Rāma spoke thus, the frightened sun sank behind the mountain in a bid to escape from his wrath! Even the elephants guarding the eight directions ran amuck. All lives came to a standstill. When it could be said that even courageous Lakshmana was afraid, could there be any limit to the fear experienced by others?

Pacifying Rāma, Jatāyu said, "May you live long, O strong and noble Rāma! *Let there be no vestige of anger in you.* The Devas and sages are hoping that with your help they can defeat Rāvana and stop his heinous acts. How can they defeat him, if

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you yourself are angry with them? You have seen how I suffer after losing my wings in my encounter with him who has obtained invincibility through Brahma's boons. Do you think anyone would have helped me to fight Rāvana, when all these Devas including Brahma pay homage to him? But for the fact that Lord Vishnu gave them the nectar of immortality, would these Devas be alive today? *O great sons possessing strong bows and arrows! You should not have followed that illusive deer with horns, leaving that tender creeper-like Seeta alone in the forest. You have brought blemish to your very race by this act. Only you are to be faulted. How can the world ever be blamed? Wipe away the sorrow of your wife whose chastity is like that of Arundati, destroy the Rākshasās and fulfil the wishes of the Devas. You have to establish whatever is enunciated in the Védas and remove all evils." Thus spoke Jatāyu who was about to reach Lord Tirumāl's divine feet!* Treating Jatāyu's advice as a command from his father, Dasaratha, the cloud-complexioned Rāma decided that there was no purpose in directing his anger towards others and that his task from then on was to destroy the Rākshasa race. Shedding his anger, Rāma assured Jatāyu, "O lord! You have asked me to give up my anger. Will I do anything to the contrary? Please tell me where Rāvana went, taking Seeta." Before Jatāyu could reply, he lost consciousness and died. *On seeing the sacred feet of Rāma, Jatāyu had the vision of Lord Mahāvishnu! As a result, he attained the perennial world of Vaikuntham, which outlasts even the five elements! Rāma and Lakshmana wept and were depressed as they watched him give up his life and reach heaven. All the trees and animals in the forest, all the mountains, humans, Nāgas and the Devas including Brahma, raised their folded hands and worshipped him. In great grief, Rāma told Lakshmana, "Brother! I stand here having lost my manliness because of Rāvana's unrighteous act. Though I was born to Dasaratha, Jatāyu claimed me as his own son because I happened to be the son of his friend. Now he lies dead, whereas I am still alive. Having forfeited everything, my dear wife, my manliness, my supporter, and my dear father Jatāyu, should I cast away all and do penance, or should I give up my life, too? What should I do?"* Lakshmana replied, "Dear brother, you are ever victorious. Are not the actions of fate relentless? What purpose will we serve by pausing and thinking? Only after demolishing those Rākshasās should we think about our great tragedy. You are a father unto me! Do not let the grief of losing Seeta prevent you from concentrating on taking the life of the Rākshasa who took the life of your father Jatāyu."

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Agreeing with Lakshmana Rāma wiped his tears, and said, "Brother, let us perform the last rites of our dead father in a fitting manner." Both Rāma and Lakshmana collected all types of wood including black aquila and sandalwood. Holy grass and flowers were spread liberally on the ground and a flawless wide platform was raised. Clean water was kept ready. Rāma lifted Jatāyu's body and placed it on the platform. Rāma, a master of the Védic hymns, decorated the body with flowers and sandalwood paste. All the wood collected was kept on the body, and Rāma set fire to one side of the head. With his lotus eyes overflowing with tears, Rāma bathed in the river, (like a cloud entering it) and did tarpana* for Jatāyu. His fury was partly quenched. Living beings in all the worlds above and below including Lord Brahma Himself felt a divine satisfaction as Rāma the universal Lord was satiated while consuming the water offered through his cupped hands for the departed Jatāyu whose bliss was beyond description. Even the sun, grieving over Jatāyu's death (as both belonged to the same race of Kasyapa), reached the western sea as though he, too, wanted to perform the water rites for Jatāyu.

11. AYŌMUKHI

After sunset, Rāma and Lakshmana reached a hill covered with crimson clouds. Mighty darkness that fanned forlorn separation, arose everywhere like hordes of Rākshasās. The surrounding forest and the mountain seemed to be shedding tears (of honey and water) in sympathy with Rāma and Lakshmana, who were in agony because of the loss of Seeta, who were angry for being deceived by Rāvana, who were full of sorrow because of the death of Jatāyu, and whose minds were torn between their agony and awakening! Like the unending chain of illusory births that ignorance gives rise to, and like the glowing fire into which ghee is poured, the night became overwhelming! It appeared endless for Rāma and Lakshmana because of their helpless state. Heroic Rāma's lotus eyes did not close that night. None could say whether it was because Lakshmi (Seeta) no longer dwelt in these 'lotuses', or because they did not sight Seeta the 'moon' on that night! None could know what was passing in the mind of Rāma after his separation from Seeta. The eyes of that divine form of virtue (Rāma) remained open, like the eyes of Lakshmana which had not closed ever since he came to the forest from Ayōdhya. *The white moon with all its beauty rose from behind the snake-ridden mountains, prompting the southern breeze to tell Rāma, "I can see the*

** Water rites peformed for a departed soul.*

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shining face of Seeta with a garland of flowers in the sky!" The appearance of the moon with its bright light encouraged Manmatha 'the nocturnal thief', to play havoc with Rāma by striking him, as if with the poisonous fangs of a serpent!

While Rāma was suffering from the shame of having lost Seeta, he was burnt by the poison known as the white light of the moon, and felt intensely for Seeta's loneliness. His shoulders which had swollen with the hope of destroying the enemy, became thin as the foe could not be traced. Thinking of Seeta, he felt she was like a tender creeper crushed by an elephant. Heaving sighs which rose and fell like the waves of an ocean, Rāma thought, "Caught by Rāvana, Seeta must have been constantly looking at the long passages on either side. I wonder what passed through her mind when that Rāvana with flashing teeth came and captured her! Seeta, who is like the moon caught in the mouth of the serpent Rāhu*, will think that I have not come to save her because I am afraid of those furious Rākshasās." Tormented by his humiliation and his desire to get Seeta back, Rāma began wondering whether he still deserved to hold the bow! He would look at his bow and laugh; and would look at his own mountain-like shoulders and deride himself that they had grown strong for nothing. He would grieve at the thought that the world would say, "Rāma lost Seeta because he failed to protect her." Looking at the 'Yama' known as the seasonal breeze, Rāma would ask, "Has Seeta who married me with all the Védic rituals gone away?" Thereafter, he would heave a sigh like an elephant and feel ashamed with the thought, "I, who, at the command of my father, had agreed to protect several lives, have proved incapable of saving even my young wife, from the sea of sorrow. My strength is great indeed!" With his tongue and mind dry, Rāma rested on a bed of cool tender leaves prepared by Lakshmana. When the leaves were burnt by the heat of his body, Rāma sat up and wondered at the cause.

Rāma, the incarnation of Mahāvishnu (a blink of whose eyes spans the passing of millenniums) could not see the end of even that one night. Whether it was because of the pangs of separation or his intense love for Seeta, we cannot say. Rāma asked Lakshmana, "Have you who never slept all these days not observed that all nights were of the same duration? Why should this night alone be so long and endless?" Addressing the moon that seemed to be waxing, Rāma said, "While you constantly waned unable to compete with the face of Seeta, you now shine in full splendour." He

* *According to mythology the eclipse of the moon occurs when Rāhu swallows the moon.*

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again asked, "Why has the sun not appeared? Has that possessor of the splendid chariot moving in the sky vanished because of the shame that has befallen me, belonging as I do to his faultless dynasty? Is that why this burning night still continues? Or is it because that treacherous Rāvana has made the sun's charioteer, Aruna, immobile, by relieving him of his lower limbs and imprisoning him along with the sun? If I do not find slender-waisted Seeta before the yuga-like night is over, I will destroy this huge world. What is the purpose of dharma if the cruel carnivorous Rākshasās, who violently torment the sages, flourish?" Looking at Rāma's sorrowful state, Manmatha hesitated to shoot his flowery arrows, constantly thinking of how he was once burnt by Lord Siva's anger! As thoughts of Seeta pierced the blue-complexioned Rāma like a trident, the night finally came to an end. The birds chirped. *The groves, the streams and everything else contained therein raised a sound in sympathy with Rāma, who was immersed in the ocean of Seeta's chastity after coming out of His sleep from the ocean of milk.* Seeing peacocks and peahens, and also male and female deer and elephants before him, Rāma was in sorrow, especially because he was separated from Seeta whose sweet words would make even a nightingale's voice, cane-juice, honey, music from the flute and yāzh, jaggery and nectar appear insipid! Terminating the long night, the sun, whose rays shone like a crown from the eastern mountain, appeared to tell Rāma, "See for yourself! The swan-like Seeta who was earlier in the fragrant lotus flower is no longer there!"

Looking at the gardens around him, Rāma would think of Seeta's beautiful hair resembling the colour of the young peacock. Looking at the Cakravaka bird, he would think of the breasts of the bird-like Seeta and his own arms which could no longer hold her in embrace. Lakshmana making obeisance to Rāma, said, "Beloved elder, is it proper to remain here without searching for golden Seeta?" Rāma agreed, "Let us find the abode of Rāvana mentioned by Jatāyu." Carrying their bows which flashed like lightning, Rāma and Lakshmana entered the hot and humid forest at the foot of the mountain. Crossing several forests and rivers, they travelled a distance of eighteen yojanas. They sighed in anger that despite their search, they were unable to find Seeta who had come to the world owing to its penance. They finally reached a big grove which was cool and full of birds. Realising the sorrow of Rāma and Lakshmana, the sun appeared to search for Seeta throughout the world and finally disappeared behind the western mountain. *This was followed by collyrium-like darkness which spread in all the ten directions like the senseless minds of fools.* In that grove, high-pitched music was taught by the mynahs to the parrots. Coming across a room made of moonstone,

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Rāma who was thirsty asked Lakshmana to fetch some drinking water. The latter with his strong bow that frightened foes went alone. Lakshmana who searched in vain for water in several places moved about like a lone lion. *He was seen by Ayōmukhi, a Rākshasi (with an iron-like face).* She was attracted towards him. Taking him to be Manmatha, Ayōmukhi followed him like a serpent. Wanting to attain him, the Rākshasi cast off her fierce look, became subdued and stood before him full of love. She thought, "To get over the malady of love which burns me, I shall embrace this man. If he resists, I shall take him to a cave and try to embrace him there. If I fail even after that, I shall swallow him." Ayōmukhi was a fierce Rākshasi. She had a stomach which was full of the many elephants she had swallowed. She had a python as her strapless bodice. Her eyes which were like deep pits, emitted fire whenever she looked intensely at anything. Her teeth were so fierce that they made even her eyes look cooler by contrast. Whenever she spoke, her voice shattered mountains and sloshed the sea out of its bed. Wherever she walked, pits were created. Ayōmukhi wore snakes for bangles, roaring tigers and fierce yālis as garlands, and lions for ear-rings.

In love with Lakshmana, Ayōmukhi stood shyly before him. Instantly realising that lustful Ayōmukhi was in the category of Soorpanakha and Tātakai, Lakshmana asked her, "Who are you? Why do you walk in this dark forest where fierce animals move about?" Ayōmukhi was shy at first to address Lakshmana with whom she was in love. She wondered whether her love would be accepted or rejected. Finally, she said, "I am Ayōmukhi. I have come to you for the fulfilment of my love. O hero endowed with great beauty, give me back my life by allowing my maiden breasts to press your chest!" Lakshmana was furious. He told her, "If you utter words of this kind again, my long arrow will split your body." His words did not arouse her anger. She lifted her hands over her head, made obeisance to him and said, "O great hero, if you accept me and we live together, I shall consider my life a success. I know that you are in search of good drinking water. If only you comfort me with the words, 'Do not fear', I shall get you water even from Ganga." Lakshmana became more furious. He said, "Get out of my way, before I cut off your ears and your nose." Without batting an eyelid, Ayōmukhi thought, "I shall take him and keep him in my cave. I am sure that he will come round after a while." Using a magic spell, she made Lakshmana lose consciousness and lifted him into the sky. *Ayōmukhi who was carrying Lakshmana, was like the Mandara mountain, like the elephant on which Devendra was seated, like the peacock on which the handsome Muruga flew with his fierce vél. Lakshmana was*

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like the furious Siva when He fought with an angry elephant and covered Himself with its hide!

As Lakshmana was being carried away by Ayōmukhi, Rāma who was already suffering from the pangs of separation from Seeta, thought with concern, "Why has Lakshmana not returned? Is it because it is difficult to get water in this wild forest? Or could there be any other reason? He usually returns fast. Could it be that he is fighting a battle with Rāvana and other Rākshasās? Has Rāvana, adopting māya tactics, taken away Lakshmana, too? Has he been killed by the sorcery of Rāvana with the connivance of fate? The holder of a sturdy bow, he who is like my very life, has not returned. Has the great grief that I lost my Seeta because I did not listen to his advice, burnt Lakshmana? I am lonely in this huge dark forest and my only eyes are Lakshmana! I do not have any other eyes! My wounded heart suffers. In this state of mind, I do not know what I should do, or where I should go and look for him now. Lakshmana! You are like the inseparable life of this Rāma who cannot get rid of his misfortunes! You, too, have left me. Though younger in age, you are older than I in knowledge. By leaving me, you have wronged me. You alone can relieve me of my sufferings. But now by going away, you have brought me unbearable agony. O heroic Lakshmana respected even by foes! How could you ever dislike me? How could you be away for so long? Do return forthwith. *Separated from my father who protected and groomed me, my mother who brought me into this world, and my beloved Seeta the wearer of golden ear-rings, am I not still alive only because I have not been separated from you? Like a young elephant, you came in search of me who went in search of the illusive deer! It is a pity that when I am now in search of my lovely Seeta, you make me go sorrowfully in search of you.* I shall die today if I do not see you. There will be none to convey the news of my death to our people, nor anyone alive after hearing of it. O cruel Lakshmana, you will thus be guilty of killing all of us. Born in the line of King Māndata, I gave up my kingdom and went to the forest. You alone came with me. But now, even you have forsaken me."

'My Lord Rāma' (says Kamban), would get up, fall down and lose his senses in a sitting posture. Rāma thought that even for thunder, there was a cause — namely lightning. Unable to comprehend the cause of his predicament, he ran hither and thither in search of Lakshmana all over the forest. Rāma, who was like a mighty furious elephant, despaired uttering his brother's name loudly, and fainted. When he came to, he cried, "Why should Lakshmana who protected me and my wife all

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these days (without even closing his eyes), delay so long? It is only because, roaming as a dead weight replete with sins, I am not destined to have a good life. *If there is dharma in this world, let Lakshmana be born as my elder brother in our next birth." Uttering these words, Rāma got ready to kill himself with a sharp sword.* Meanwhile, Lakshmana extricated himself from the magic spell of Ayōmukhi and cut off her nose, ears and lips. Her loud cry was heard by Rāma. He realised that the voice he heard was that of a Rākshasi shouting in pain and not that of several Rākshasās throwing a challenge. He took a powerful arrow known as Agni-astram* and shot it. Instantly, the dark forest burst into light as though night had changed into day.

Crushing mountains, breaking huge trees, hurting the earth and raising crackling sounds, Rāma went three times as fast as a whirlwind, towards the spot from where the sound had emerged. Lakshmana saw Rāma and said, "O charitable brother, do not grieve. I am coming. Your endless affection for me makes you needlessly anxious." Lakshmana then reached the handsome feet of Rāma. On seeing him, Rāma felt as if he had got back his lost eyes. Tears now arose from them like a fountain. He was like a cow whose udder overflowed with milk as soon as her calf returned after a long period of separation. He embraced Lakshmana several times, bathed his golden-hued body with flowing tears and said, "O possessor of pillar-like arms! I was afraid that I had lost you because you did not return for a long time. Tell me what happened." Lakshmana explained everything in detail. Rāma was partly happy and partly sad. Lakshmana told him, "Should those who are caught in the mighty ocean be worried whenever a wave comes up? Is it proper for us, trapped in the harsh prison of births (as a result of our sins), to fear unending hardship?" *Rāma replied, "Dear brother! Neither the Trinity of Gods, nor anyone in the three worlds can defeat me, only because you are by my side. What other protection do I need? Let everyone who wants to leave me go away. Let me be beset with any hardship. O possessor of a hero's anklets! As long as you are with me, all my sorrows will vanish. Do they have the strength to persist and trouble me when you are here?* You told me that you returned after defeating Ayōmukhi. Why did you not slay her?" Lakshmana explained, "When I cut off her nose, ears and lips, the Rākshasi cried out in agony and so I let her go." Rāma complimented his brother and said, "As a scion of the line of Manu, you did well in not slaying her even though she confronted you in severe darkness and was about to

* *An arrow which has the prowess of Agni (fire).*

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take your life." Feeling relieved that they had come out of a great catastrophe, Rāma and Lakshmana recited hymns invoking Varuna who brought rains from the sky. The brothers drank this water and went on to a huge mountain near by. Lakshmana made a bed out of tender leaves and flowers. Rāma rested on the bed in great sorrow, with Lakshmana caressing his feet.

After losing the peacock-like Seeta, Rāma could not eat anything, because of the disgrace. He could not sleep because of the pangs of separation. His life oscillated between deep sighs. He went on thinking about Seeta and said to himself, "Everywhere in this forest, I see only the form of Seeta. Is it because I am not able to forget the noble Seeta? Or is it because of some magic spell of the Rākshasās? *I try to embrace Seeta of dark tresses and large eyes, a jewel among chaste women; but I do not see anything in my arms. Has her form, too, disappeared like her waist?* A little while ago I consumed nectar from her fruity coral mouth, but I do not see her now! Can anyone dream even while not asleep? *If I am to suffer from an agony that is greater than the world, sky, water, fire or wind, it can only be this treacherous night itself. O night, you are longer than the eyes of King Janaka's great daughter with dark, cool and fragrant tresses!* Is the moon in the sky (which arose from the sea), a burning pralaya fire surrounded by blebs which we call stars?" Thinking endlessly, Rāma became weak and lost his consciousness. In the mean time, the sun rose as if he wanted to wipe away the sorrow of Rāma who belonged to his race.

12. KAVANDHA

After daybreak, the two brothers went in search of peacock-like Seeta, whose absence was lamented by twittering birds, and whose forbearance surpassed even the earth. With their bows, the two moved about in the forest for a distance of fifty yōjanas. After walking till noon, they reached the domain of a Rākshasa known as Kavandha. Standing in one place, this Rākshasa with his long hands outstretched would catch all living beings from elephants to ants and push them into his terrible stomach. Even ferocious lions and tigers when caught by his long arms were frightened as if they were trapped in a net from which it was impossible to escape. *All animals caught by him shivered like the inhabitants of a kingdom ruled by a worthless tyrant who did not know how to guard his own people.* Looking at him, animals used to herd together or run helter-skelter. Embraced by him, mountains trembled and trees got uprooted, the course of rivers changed and clouds were brought down from the sky.

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Rāma and Lakshmana found themselves in the space between Kavandha's ferocious arms while he roared like the rising sea flowing from the four directions during pralaya. Walled in by those arms which resembled the Cakravala mountains, Rāma and Lakshmana thought they were meeting a Rākshasa army. Rāma told Lakshmana, "The abode of Rāvana must be near. Our sorrows will soon be over." Lakshmana replied, "I do not think we are encircled by an army of Rākshasās; if it were so, we would have heard the sound of drums and conches. What is confronting us is something else. It looks as though we are caught between the head and tail of the white-toothed serpent, Vāsuki." The advancing Rāma agreed with Lakshmana. Together, they walked the distance of a yōjana or two in the space occupied by Kavandha's long arms and stood before him. The huge Rākshasa whom they saw, had two powerful eyes which looked like two suns stuck on the huge Meru mountain. The gap between one tooth and another was two kādams! His mouth was in the middle of his abdomen. Smoke and fire emerged from his two nostrils as if they were the blowing bellows of a blacksmith. His tongue was like the flame of a submarine fire that consumed water from the sea. *The fierce protruding teeth on either side of his mouth looked like two halves of the moon taking refuge in a cave. Kavandha was so fierce that he looked like a combination of not only the five elements, but also the five major sins, namely, drinking, stealing, acquiring another man's wife, uttering falsehood, and committing murder. His treacherous stomach put even the worst hell to shame.*

Seeing Kavandha's mouth which was like Yama's gateway, Rāma and Lakshmana thought that it must be an old entrance to a Rākshasa's ancient impregnable abode. Looking carefully at Kavandha, Lakshmana said, "This is a fierce fiend that catches all objects with its hands and puts them into its mouth. We are caught in its arms. What shall we do now?" Rāma replied with dejection, "Brother! Seeta is lost. Jatāyu, my father who tried to protect her, is dead. I do not propose to live with these sins which torment my mind. I shall offer myself as meat to this fiend. Please go back to Ayōdhya from here. I have been responsible for the sorrow of my parents, for the sufferings you underwent by accompanying me, and for the misery undergone by noble ones living in the forest. Only death can rid me of this blemish. Can I, with my bow and quiver of arrows, go to King Janaka and tell him that sweet-tongued Seeta is in a Rākshasa's house? It is better if people say, 'Rāma died and went to heaven', instead of saying, 'Rāma was avaricious. He was eager to rule his land though he was unable to protect Seeta!' Therefore it is good to give up my life." Lakshmana said, "Having come with you, if this sorrow should overtake you, it is I who should die first. If I were to go back

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alive instead, my action would be 'wonderful' indeed! One who has conquered difficulties, is considered a courageous person. If he quietly disappears in the presence of his father, mother and brother, his fame will vanish. I would rather have people laud me, saying, 'This brother, without even sleeping during nights, protected Seeta and his elder brother Rāma while they lived in the forest', instead of being censured with the words, 'This man has returned alone without Rāma and Seeta.' *When we left for the forest, my mother, Sumitra, ordered me, 'Carry out all the wishes of your brother. Even if you encounter difficulties while obeying his commands, bear them. If Rāma is about to meet his end, give up your life before that happens.' Is it dharma to disobey my noble mother's wish? The fame my mother and I wish to attain is that we two were ever loyal to you and your mother! I do not wish to retain my precious life by deserting you."* Lakshmana continued, "It is preposterous for me to think that this fiend who eats elephants and survives in the forest, is going to kill you the Universal God indestructible even after pralaya. No one will agree if you say, 'I will die as a result of this fiend consuming me'. Instead of people extolling you by saying, 'This man vanquished his adversaries in a battle and saved beautiful Seeta', if they were to say, 'This man died, unable to win in a battle', could anything more disgraceful happen to you? I do not think that this fiend, raging like poison, is something which cannot be destroyed by our swords. You will now see how I cut off the hands and the ghastly mouth of this creature. Do not therefore be concerned."

Even before Lakshmana could conclude, Rāma charged towards Kavandha. When Lakshmana tried to overtake Rāma, the latter overtook the former. There was none to prevent the two from surging forward. Looking at them (like the two eyes of a face) rushing towards him, Kavandha asked, "Who are you, O unfortunate ones facing me?" Rāma and Lakshmana stood before Kavandha and glared at him. Amazed at their courage, Kavandha tried to snatch the two brothers with his hands hoping to swallow them. Rāma and Lakshmana instantly cut off his big hands. Touched by the beautiful hands of the universal Lord Rāma, Kavandha was suddenly transformed into a handsome figure and soared into the sky like a bird escaping from a cage. In his celestial form, Kavandha said, "This is Rāma who makes His divine appearance to Brahma and other Devas during their meditation." Extolling the countless qualities of Rāma, Kavandha added, "None else except you could have redeemed me from my curse. Are you not the ideal form of the indestructible dharma? Was it not the penance of the Devas that brought you here? Are you not the primordial beginning of the Trinity of Gods? The forms that you assume are inscrutable. Are you the

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banyan tree seen during pralaya, or its seed, or the child that rests on the leaf? Please enlighten me. The objects seen, and those who see, are all yourself, though you stand aloof with detachment. You do not receive the good or bad of these objects. You are the one who protects all the worlds from the deluge by containing them in your belly. *Are you a male or a female, or sexless, or beyond sex? None can discern. You are the ancient Brahma. You are the very origin of all. When the Védas proclaim you as the flame of fire, other deities are bound to feel ashamed! Existing in the divine lotus-bud, you are present in all the eight quarters, the fourteen worlds, the three zones traversed by the sun, the moon and the stars and also the space above them. You are the offering that is poured into the sacrificial fire as well as the God that consumes that offering. Who can understand this dichotomy?* None in this world can ever comprehend how the several worlds that appear like bubbles arising from the ocean during pralaya, come out of you simultaneously and return to you.

"None can say whether the great Védas follow you, or your actions follow the Védas. To have attained by your grace the greatness which no sinner can hope to attain, what virtuous deeds must I have done in my previous birth? You have helped me to get rid of my fiendish form. You have enabled me to cross the sea of sorrow and reach the shore. My animosity towards you, flowing out of my ignorance, has been removed by you. To be blessed like this, what good did a cur like me do?" *After extolling Rāma with several words, Kavandha thought, "To reveal more, including the place where Seeta is imprisoned, will not suit the celestials."* Like the calf that was happy on seeing the cow, Kavandha gazed at Rāma and stood happily. Divine Rāma told Lakshmana, "Brother! Look carefully and see whether this form standing in the sky is the one killed by us, or some other divine form!" Lakshmana asked Kavandha, "Who are you?" Kavandha told Rāma, "O heroic wearer of an exquisite garland and jewels! I am a Gandharva known as Dhanu. The curse of a sage turned me into a hateful Rākshasa. The touch of your flower-like hands lifted the curse and restored my original form. You are like my father's father. Please listen to what I have to say. There is no one competent enough to protect you, as you can look after yourself with your bows and arrows. Still, you will have to seek the assistance of a few in your attempt to find that incomparable Seeta. *Just as it is difficult to cross a sea without the help of a boat, it is hard to defeat an enemy without some help.* I do know of your capabilities. Even the great 'destroyer' Lord Siva, takes the assistance of powerful deities. Therefore, please consider all actions on the basis of dharma. Try to befriend the virtuous, and avoid the wicked. I suggest that you seek the advice of Sabari who has

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greater compassion than even a mother. *Embrace Sugreeva, establish a friendship with him, and search for Seeta."* Uttering these words, Kavandha made obeisance to Rāma and soared into the sky. Rāma and Lakshmana accepted Kavandha's advice and walked in the direction shown by him. They traversed a forest full of elephants and finally reached a mountain occupied by Sage Mātanga.

13. SABARI

The hermitage of Sage Mātanga was surrounded by a grove where everything needed in the world was available. The grove was like the celestial karpaga tree that gave whatever one wanted. Devoid of sorrow, the grove was full of happiness. It was a heaven where virtuous ones stayed. *A noble sage known as Sabari lived in this hermitage, meditating on Rāma.* Meeting Sabari there, Rāma made enquiries about her welfare. Sabari was thrilled at the sight of Rāma and extolled him with devotion. Tears of happiness flowed from her eyes like a stream. She told Rāma, "After seeing your august form, my attachment for this illusory world has come to an end. My long penance has been rewarded by your arrival, and I am relieved of birth." Sabari then brought fruits for Rāma and said, "Lord Siva, Brahma and Devendra had come here and said to me, 'As a culmination of your pure penance, you will soon be blessed with the arrival of Rāma. Look forward to it and do everything to please him and then come to our celestial realm'! O beloved father! The thought that you would be visiting this place steadily grew in my mind and I find today the fulfilment of my penance." *Looking at that queen of penance, Rāma said, "O mother! Your sweet welcome has removed the hardship of our tiresome walk. May you live long!"*

Rāma and Lakshmana stayed in the hermitage the whole day. Later, Sabari looked at the two with great affection. Through her divine knowledge, she told them the location of a mountain known as Rishyamukham, where the great Sugreeva, the son of Sooryā, lived. Rāma, who was like nectar for noble ones in quest of true knowledge, listened to Sabari attentively as if she were a preceptor unfolding the truthful path to salvation. As a result of her hard penance, the noble Sabari released herself from her body and left for the celestial world. After watching this sight with immeasurable amazement, Rāma and Lakshmana with ringing anklets, proceeded in the direction suggested by Sabari. *They traversed a long distance, crossing cool and fragrant forests and mountains and finally reached lake Pampai which was like punyam (the effect of virtuous deeds) melted into water due to the fire of sins of innumberable persons who bathe in it!*

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KISHKINDA KĀNDAM

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1. LAKE PAMPAI

Lake Pampai full of flowers was sought by humming bees. Fierce elephants with red eyes came often to bathe in the lake which was so full of water that it appeared to have the very clouds in it. Whenever there was a breeze, the water splashed against the shores of the lake which possessed the scintillating colours of the nine gems. *As a result, the lake's water looked different at different times, like the unclear minds of those who scan several books, but fail to understand the truth contained therein.* The lake was full of pearls and beautiful male and female swans. The whole scene looked like an everlasting firmament full of bright moons with their `consorts' of stars! *When Sage Viswāmitra created a world of his own, he also created a sea which destroyed the pride of the existing salty sea. The Pampai lake was like that sea created by Viswāmitra!* Because of the lustre of the rubies it contained, the lake resembled the shining abyss of the serpents' nether world. *The lake's brightness went deep into the earth like the content and meaning of the words composed by renowned poets!* The sweet music of the swans and the chirping of different birds mingled together making it impossible to identify the sound of any particular bird. The mixed sound coming from several birds made the place noisy like a bazaar in a town. The swans on the lotuses seemed to say, "We who do not know the place where Seeta has gone would rather die than see the face of Rāma," and appeared ready to fall into fire. *Though the lake was full of pearls and other gems, there were patches of moss here and there even like the patches of ignorance seen among learned ones.* The fishes in the lake tried to hide from Rāma, fearing that he who had not shed tears so far might weep on seeing them because they would remind him of the eyes of Seeta who was chastity incarnate. The mountain stream carried in its flow, gems and elephant tusks. The honey from tall mountains and the rutting fluid of elephants flooded the lake. *The intoxicating effect of the water made the lake resemble women possessing beautiful red lips! The varied noises made by the different types of birds in the lake resembled the cacophony made by half-baked poets speaking loudly to each other in eighteen different languages including Sanskrit.*

The sweet tinkle of the anklets of the celestial women bathing in the Pampai was listened to with attention by the male swans who mistook it for the sweet voice of their female partners who had left them like life leaving the body. Logs of sandalwood and other kinds of fragrant wood were brought to this lake by the force of the water coming from huge mountains. As a result, the lake was like a vessel wherein

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sandalwood paste was kept. The crocodiles in the lake were lying about drowsily, having sucked nectar from flowers resembling the red lips of women. *Water-crows frequently darted into the water and came out, with a fish in their beaks, reminding one of the constant cycle of birth and death.* The swans in the lake with their beautiful movement seemed to tell Rāma, "We are not capable of bringing back Seeta who is Goddess Lakshmi dwelling in the lotus. All that we can do, is to imitate her gait." Similarly, the black lilies reminded Rāma of Seeta's beautiful eyes while the red flowers brought to his mind the beauty of her lips. Celestial women bathed in that lake every day, and the ornaments worn by them shed lustre everywhere. Their maids stood on the shores of the lake holding toy swans for them to play with. On the mango trees adjoining the lake, cranes would sit and dry their feathers. The reflections of these cranes seen in the crystal clear water of the lake looked so real that the shoals of fish in it would get alarmed fearing that cranes had entered the water to eat them. The lake had the unique distinction of having blue gems on one side of the shore and red gems on the other, like the combination of *night and day.* The sword-fish in the lake moved like a sword hurled with great force while water-dogs noisily danced on the waves! Frogs watching the scene croaked loudly in appreciation.

When Rāma reached this huge lake and saw the swans and lotuses, he thought sadly of Seeta and lost his balance of mind. "O beautiful birds!" he cried. "O tender swans! Seeta who has never been away from me is no longer with me, and I am depressed. Why do you not come and console me by uttering at least one word of solace? Will you come to any harm if you do so?" Rāma then addressed the lake, "With your lotuses and fragrant flowers, you are a balm to my mind which is consumed by loneliness. *When you are able to exhibit individual features like the eyes and face of Seeta, why do you not reveal her whole form?"* Rāma then looked at the lilies, the lotuses, the waves of water, the variety of fishes and the tortoises in the lake and said to them, *"I have seen Seeta's beautiful eyes, mouth, face, ears, waist, ankles and feet in you. Tell me whether all these were dropped here when Rāvana was eating Seeta in the vast sky?"* Rāma went on prattling and raving like one mad. He saw and addressed a peacock, "Though you were put to shame by Seeta's complexion you no longer feel you have a rival and so you boldly run and dance before me. How can you do this, knowing how sad I feel without her? Why do you not tell me which way she went? How could she have gone unnoticed by your thousand eyes?" Rāma then turned to the swans in the lake and said, "Can you not at least utter a word of what you know about Seeta? I have not done you any harm. Why do you torment me by

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your silence? You may be angry with Seeta because she put your gait to shame; but you have no reason to be angry with me. I plead with you only because you walk like Seeta!" Rāma then addressed the lotus, "Seeta is no longer with me. *She cannot live anywhere except in a lotus.* If you tell me that she is not with you (her place of birth), I will consider you a liar and will have nothing to do with you." Looking at a red tuft by the side of the red water-lily, Rāma asked, "Why are you not uttering a word? While you have the courage to resemble her mouth which speaks words as sweet as nectar, should you not speak like her?" Looking at the water-creeper, he exclaimed, "You are like the ears of young Seeta which resemble a flowering plant. You can therefore willingly help me, distressed as I am. You, who have avoided wearing golden and circular ear-rings (out of respect for her), can tell me where Seeta has gone, instead of seeking my enmity." Turning angrily to the black lilies, he said, "You have now blossomed in full and are laughing at me. Your laughter is like poison because you remind me of the black eyes of my beautiful Seeta." Talking aloud to himself, Rāma sat on the shore of the Pampai and addressed the lake again. "Even though I continue to express my grief, you remain silent." Watching a male elephant draw water through its trunk and pour it into the mouth of a female elephant which was eating delicious green leaves, Rāma was reminded of Seeta and felt sad. *Lakshmana, the wearer of the scarce jewel known as compassion, told Rāma that the day was drawing to a close and suggested that he bathe in the lake and worship Lord Trivikrama.* Rāma sorrowfully entered the fragrant lake. His body emitted such hot rays due to his love for Seeta, that the water in the lake became as hot as the water into which a blacksmith immerses red hot iron.

Rāma, himself an incarnation of Mahāvishnu, poured sacred water on the feet of Lord Mahāvishnu and worshipped Him! He finally rested in a corner of a garden inhabited by sages. As the sun set, darkness crept in and Rāma was ruminating over the loneliness of Seeta who was not with him. He felt so sad that the moon which rose from the cool sea, appeared like the sun with hot rays. Many varieties of flowers that bloom during the day faded. The birds in the groves confined themselves to their nests, beasts became inactive, leaves on trees wilted, parrots ended their prattling, peacocks no longer danced, nightingales stopped cooing and male elephants ceased to trumpet. Night came and put all living beings to sleep. All the living creatures in the mountains slept. Even the serpents of the nether world slept. All the birds that used to fly in the sky slept. Ghosts also slept. *Rāma and Lakshmana alone were awake. The hot sun finally rose from the sea to relieve Rāma from his severe sorrow, like true*

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knowledge entering one's mind and chasing away sins! The lotus flowers bloomed with the rising of the sun. Without losing any time, Rāma and Lakshmana wended their way through mountains and forests, in search of deer-like Seeta.

2. HANUMAN

Rāma and Lakshmana rapidly climbed the Rishyamukha mountain. Sugreeva, the king of the vānaras (monkeys), saw the two archers and feared that they were enemies. Not knowing what to do, he looked at Hanumān who was by his side and said, "O son of Vāyu, I see two persons coming up the mountain. They have their bows with them. They themselves look like blue mountains. They appear to have come to torment us at the behest of our enemy, Vāli. You are always good at finding out the truth! Please go and learn all about them." Sugreeva then hid himself in a cave. *Sugreeva and the other monkeys were like the Devas and Asuras who were frightened of the Hālāhala poison that emerged during the churning of the ocean of milk. Whereas Hanuman was like Lord Siva who held the powerful poison in His throat and gave confidence to the Devas and Asuras.* Hanuman, whose mother was Anjana, looked at his fellow-vānaras and asked them not to fear. He disguised himself as a brahmacāri and approached Rāma and Lakshmana. He thought, "Holding powerful bows in their hands, they look like warriors, though dressed like ascetics. They cannot be the Trinity of Gods, as they are not three in number. I wonder with whom I can compare them. What are they in search of? How shall I find out who they really are? I can make out that there is something worrying them. They appear to be distressed; but still, they do not look like such weaklings as to succumb to sufferings. They cannot be celestials because they resemble humans. They appear to take dharma and virtue as part of their lives. They seem to have lost a precious object and are obviously looking for it. They do not seem to be easy victims of anger. Their compassion appears to be vast, like the ocean. Their character can instil fear even in the god of dharma and Devendra. Manmatha is no match for them; even Yama would be afraid of the valour of these two." As Hanuman assessed them and looked at them intently, a great love for them arose in him. He became happy as though he was about to be reunited with his old friends. Closely watching them in wonder, he said, "Even fearless rogue elephants view them with the affection shown to an offspring. Ferocious lions, tigers and other animals meekly but eagerly follow them. Peacocks spread out their feathers and appear to protect them from the heat of the sun. The clouds sprinkle water on them. The very trees and grass bend as if to make obeisance to these noble persons who appear to be dharma

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incarnate. Even my bones seem to melt when I see them. The love that I have suddenly acquired for them is boundless. I do not know what great good is going to happen as a result of this."

With noble thoughts in his mind, Hanuman stood before Rāma and Lakshmana and welcomed them. Rāma asked Hanuman, "Who are you? Where have you come from?" Hanuman replied, "I am the son of Vāyu. My mother is Anjana. I am known as Hanuman. I serve Sugreeva who lives in Rishyamukham. He is Soorya's son. Sugreeva saw you and sent me to find out who you are." After listening to Hanuman, Rāma felt, "There appears to be none more capable than this person. Qualities like character, efficiency, modesty, and knowledge resulting from education, cannot be separated from him." *Rāma told Lakshmana, "There is no art, nor any Véda which this great man has not mastered. This is evident from the way he speaks. I wonder if this possesser of the wealth of exquisite words is Brahma, or Siva! I do not think that he is an ordinary brahmacāri."* Turning to Hanuman, Rāma asked, "Where is Sugreeva, the vānara king? We have come here in search of him. Please take us to him." Hanuman replied, "Who is there like you in this huge world with such a sincere heart? If you have come to meet Sugreeva, it could only be the result of *his* good fortune. Probably the penance performed by him has rid him of his sins, and your arrival is because of that. Sugreeva, the son of Soorya, was driven away by his elder brother, Vāli, the son of Devendra. Sugreeva now hides along with us in this mountain. You have come here as a prelude to his getting back his riches. Good people have the habit of doing good deeds like yāga and penance; but the best act is giving protection to one who seeks refuge by saving him from the clutches of his deadly enemy. You are like Lord Muruga who can protect all moving and stationary objects in the universe. Is it not therefore very easy for you to protect us, who surrender to you totally? *Please command me as to how I should introduce you to my leader, Sugreeva."* Narrating the sequence of events that brought them to the present state, Lakshmana said, "Emperor Dasaratha, born in the Solar dynasty ruled the world and became dear to one and all. Even Campara and other Asuras were killed by Dasaratha. He excelled Manu in the art of ruling. He was the ruler of Ayōdhya replete with golden mansions and huge walls. He has gone to heaven after performing several yāgas and completing his life in this world as a distinguished king. Dasaratha's son, who is endowed with majestic qualities, is my brother who is here by my side. He left the kingdom (which belonged to him by virtue of being the eldest son) just to fulfil the wishes of his stepmother, who wanted the kingdom to be ruled by *her* son Bharata. Giving the kingdom to his

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younger brother, he has come away to the forest. His name is Rāma. I am privileged to do the bidding of this elder brother who has mastered the art of archery." Lakshmana went on narrating in detail all that had happened in the forest, including the heinous act of Rāvana. After listening to Lakshmana, Hanuman fell at the feet of Rāma and made obeisance to him. Rāma said, "O master of the Sāstras and the Védas! You should not prostrate yourself before me. This does not do justice to your status." Hanuman replied, "O lotus-eyed Lord, I, your subordinate, belong to the vānara race." *Hanuman, the reliever of the loneliness of dharma, transformed himself into his huge, original form which put to shame even the Védas and the golden-peaked Meru.* Even Rāma who was none other than Lord Vishnu (who had once taken the form of Trivikrama when He measured the three worlds with His lotus feet), could not raise his head high enough to see the face of Hanuman adorned with golden ear-rings. When Hanuman (who had learnt all the ancient texts from Soorya) showed his real form, it was beyond description! *Rāma was amazed at this sight and told Lakshmana, "The magnificent form of this vānara is nothing but the form given to the timeless Védas and knowledge beyond words.* We have started with good omens today. That is why we have been able to meet this great Hanuman. We will not suffer from any hardship hereafter. When the messenger, Hanuman, himself is like this, need we speak of his leader Sugreeva?" Hanuman looked at Rāma and Lakshmana and told them, "Victorious ones! Please wait here. I shall immediately inform Sugreeva of your arrival." Taking leave of them, Hanuman hurried away.

3. SEEKING SUGREEVA'S FRIENDSHIP

Ruminating over the excellent qualities of Rāma, Hanuman, whose strong shoulders and fame were like the Mandara mountain, was relieved that he, his vānaras and the world were now safe in the hands of Rāma. Like Lord Siva, Hanuman danced before his king, Sugreeva, and said, "It appears as though Yama (in the form of two brothers) has arrived to take away cruel Vāli's life. We have now crossed the sea of sorrow. The two persons who have come here are in the minds of all the people of the terrestrial, celestial and nether worlds and all those living in the eight directions! They are present in the actions, words and eyes of everyone! They are like nectar to those who surrender to them! They are the sons of Emperor Dasaratha who had brought all the worlds under his rule. These brothers are strong and handsome. They will help you with ease to get back your kingdom. They believe in justice and follow dharma most steadfastly. They are superior to everyone. Their knowledge of nature is beyond

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the comprehension of any. They are famous, and own powerful weapons given to them by Sage Viswāmitra. Rāma who is the elder of these two, slew with his bow the Rākshasi known as Tātakai and her son, Subāhu. By the touch of his feet, he gave Ahalya back her original form. Before he married Seeta, he broke the magnificent bow of Lord Siva. The kingdom offered to him by the powerful Emperor Dasaratha was handed over by him (as desired by his stepmother, Kaikeyi) to Bharata, his younger brother. He is now living in this forest. He has vanquished the invincible Parasurāma who used to annihilate his enemies with his axe. He has slain the powerful Virādha and the mighty Khara and his vast Rākshasa army. His strength is superior even to that of Lord Siva and others. My dear king! Rāma in human form is none other than Lord Mahāvishnu from the ocean of milk. He was like Yama to Mārica who appeared as an illusive deer. A huge Rākshasa known as Kavandha was killed by him. The great Sage Sabari left her earthly form and went to heaven after offering her salutations to him. Even other sages have been doing penance hoping that Rāma would one day come to them and enable them to reach the celestial realm. How can I adequately express the greatness of Rāma and Lakshmana? Beloved king, foolish Rāvana abducted Rāma's wife, Seeta. Fortunately for you, because of the good penance done by you and because of your sincere heart and mind, Rāma and Lakshmana have come here with compassion seeking *your* friendship. Therefore, Vāli, our enemy, is sure to die. Please come and meet Rāma and Lakshmana." With these words, Hanuman gave such advice as was appropriate and timely for a king.

Sugreeva grasped all that was said by Hanuman and replied, "When I have *you* as my companion, nothing is difficult for me. Let us go." Then they reached the sacred feet of Rāma who could be compared to none but himself. Sugreeva saw with awe the handsome face (without the shining ear-rings) and the compassionate eyes of Rāma. Sugreeva stood gazing at Rāma and Lakshmana for a long time and was immersed in their beauty. He felt that they were the very essence and personification of the sum total of all the good acts performed so far in this world of Brahma. He thought, "Lord Mahāvishnu who is the Lord of gods, is now reborn as these two human beings, and they surpass even Lord Brahma and Lord Siva." Full of such thoughts and floating in a sea of love, Sugreeva approached Rāma and was received with love. Waving his handsome lotus-like hands, Rāma asked Sugreeva to be seated. *The meeting of Rāma who had cast away possessiveness and Sugreeva who was the king of the vānaras, was like the meeting of the sun and the moon on an Amāvāsya* day. The meeting of*

* *Amāvāsya day is the new-moon day, when the moon and the sun rise together.*

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these two was also like the meeting of appropriate time and dharma for the dispelling of the darkness resulting from the misdeeds of the Rākshasās. The friendly meeting of Rāma and Sugreeva was like the amalgam of the penance done in their previous births and the efforts made by them in the present birth to consolidate the results of their earlier penance. Their meeting was like the combination of formal education and knowledge derived from thinking, a combination which would uproot the living form of sins namely the Rākshasās!

Sugreeva told Rāma, "I am fortunate to have attained you, the repository of all that is good and the very epitome of good character, the most precious thing in the world. There is indeed no one who could have done greater penance than I because I have obtained you as a friend. With your support, no harm can come to me." Rāma replied, "My friend, it was that blemishless Sage Sabari, who told me of your presence here. We came with the belief that you would be able to wipe away our grief which has made us inert." Sugreeva who heard this said, "Vāli, my elder brother, lifting his powerful big hand to hit me, chased me throughout this world as well as through the dark territories beyond this world. To escape him, I have been hiding here in this mountain. Now that I have sought your benediction, it is your duty to save me." Rāma looked at Sugreeva compassionately and said, "All these years you experienced happiness as well as sorrow. I assure you that henceforth I shall relieve you of all your sufferings and share your feelings. Whether in this world or in the celestial world, anyone harming you will have harmed me. Whoever is your friend (even if he is wicked) shall be my friend. All my people are yours; and your relations and companions are mine, too. From now on you shall be my friend." Listening to the words of blemishless Rāma, the vānaras (gathered there) roared for joy. They considered his words more truthful than even the Védas. Hanuman, too, became excited. The Devas showered Rāma with flowers. The clouds sprinkled water on him. The leonine son of Anjana fell at his sacred feet and said, "May you and your friend Sugreeva live long. We request you to come and rest." "So be it," said Rāma. *Followed and blessed by the god of dharma, Rāma and Lakshmana surrounded by Sugreeva, Hanuman and the ferocious vānara battalion, reached a lovely garden (with plenty of green foliage, flowers and lakes) which put to shame even the celestial region.* The garden abounded in sandalwood and akhil trees. The water in the lakes was crystal clear. The lakes were full of gems and the lands were replete with karpaga trees from which swings hung as if for the amusement of celestial women. *The big gems in the forest shone so beautifully that it was difficult for the rays of the sun and moon to*

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match them, just as it is difficult for an uneducated person to shine before learned persons who have imbibed knowledge from books through teachers. Rāma, Lakshmana, and Sugreeva seated in that lovely garden were talking to each other freely with love. Hanuman and others brought fine vegetables, roots and fruits which Rāma and Lakshmana ate after bathing in the river.

Full of compassion for Sugreeva, Rāma accepted his hospitality. Looking at him Rāma felt sad and asked him thoughtfully, *"Are you also separated from your wife, who is essential to lead a happy domestic life?"* Standing like a mountain before Rāma, with folded hands Hanuman said, "I wish to tell you something. O repository of everlasting justice, please listen to me. There is one who is known as Vāli. *He has the blessings of Lord Siva who protects the four Védas like a fence.* This Vāli has strong arms with which he churned the ocean of milk with the Mandara mountain, using the serpent Vāsuki as a rope. He has the combined strength of the four elements, earth, water, fire and wind. He is capable of leaping from the coastal mountain to this mountain at a stretch. He is the recipient of a boon by which he can obtain half the strength of any adversary with whom he fights. Every day, he visits the eight directions and bows at the feet of the eight deities. Even the wind cannot compete with him in speed. The weapon used by Lord Muruga known as the Vél, cannot pierce his chest. *Rāvana's writ can run only where Vāli's tail does not appear. Where Vāli's tail is seen, Rāvana can neither rule nor achieve victory.* If Vāli were to stand erect, even mountains like Meru will be shaken to their very roots. The sky, huge clouds, the mountains, the sun and the moon can be captured by his huge arms. He has the strength of the Boar* which took the whole world on His tusk and the divine Tortoise* seen in the ancient sea. I wonder whether even Lord Narasimha who tore the body of that mighty Hiranyan would be able to contain the shoulders of Vāli! None can say whether it is for fear of Vāli's wrath that the ocean rolls and makes a sound, or the wind moves, or the sun orbits in his chariot! He has the combined strength of several powerful vānaras and can pulverize the Meru. Because of his unlimited strength and his army of seventy vellam** monkeys, all living creatures prefer to follow him. Clouds do not thunder near his abode fearing his roar. Afraid of him, ferocious lions, too, do not roar from their dens. Even strong winds do not blow anywhere near his

* *Earlier incarnations of Lord Mahāvishnu*

** *One vellam is roughly a billion.*

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abode. Long ago, he bound Rāvana's twenty shoulders with his tail and flew all over the world. There is no place where Rāvana's blood was not spilt at that time.

"Vāli, the son of Devendra, has the complexion of the full moon and is the elder brother of Sugreeva. This great Vāli was our king, with Sugreeva as the prince. A long time ago, Māyāvi, a powerful enemy of Vāli, came for a fight with him. After fighting for some time, Māyāvi realised that Vāli's strength was superior to his and thought that if he wanted to stay alive in this *round world*, he should escape. He ran away and hid himself in a cave. Vāli became furious and told Sugreeva, "I will go into the cave, catch Māyāvi and return soon. You stand at the entrance and prevent him from escaping." For twenty-eight months Vāli searched for Māyāvi inside the cave hoping to destroy him. Meanwhile, Sugreeva was worried because his brother did not come out of the cave. We all thought that Vāli was dead. We approached the sorrowful Sugreeva and told him, 'Your inaction is not good for the kingdom. Please accept the responsibility of administering the state'. Sugreeva who could not get over his grief said, 'That will be a crime. Instead, I shall search for my brother in the cave. If he is dead, I shall slay the enemy; and if I cannot vanquish the enemy, I shall die in the fight'. But the convincing words of the ministers and the pressure exerted by other vānaras, prevented Sugreeva from entering the cave. The task of ruling the kingdom was thrust on him by the elders. Ordered by the vānaras, Sugreeva was forced to rule. Fearing that Māyāvi who killed Vāli might come out of the cave, we blocked the entrance with all other mountains except the Meru! We later brought Sugreeva, made him the king, and were living in the Kishkinda mountain. None of us knew that Vāli had killed Māyāvi during the period Sugreeva was ruling Kishkinda. Vāli, after having drunk the blood of Māyāvi, came to the entrance. Finding it closed, he called the name of his brother. When he got no reply, he thought he was betrayed and exclaimed, 'A fine brother of mine, indeed!' Then Vāli stood erect, lifted his tail and forcefully kicked the entrance with his foot. The mountains with which we had blocked the entrance were crushed and the fragments were seen flying in the blue sky, a few of them falling into the sea. Vāli came out of the cave and roared so loudly that all of us were frightened.

"The truthful Sugreeva, without even the slightest ill-feeling, prostrated himself at the feet of his brother and told him, 'Beloved brother and my lord, when you did not return from the cave for a long time, I wondered what had happened to you. I wanted to come in and help you. But our vānaras did not allow me to do so. Instead, they told me that it was my duty to rule and protect them. Fearing the wrath of our vānaras, I have been ruling the state instead of coming to you. Please pardon me'. Vāli

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was not convinced. He was angry with Sugreeva and spoke harshly. With his powerful hands, he punched Sugreeva who became terribly frightened. Waiting for the moment when Vāli raised his hands again to beat him, Sugreeva ran away. There is no place safe enough even for Yama when Vāli gnashes his teeth and becomes angry. It is only because of a curse suffered by Vāli, that it has been possible for Sugreeva to come and stay alive in this mountain. Vāli sought and kept Urumai, the noble wife of Sugreeva. Having lost his kingdom and his wife, Sugreeva is now here. This is what happened, O lord!" Listening to noble Hanuman, Rāma became furious. His lips twitched and his eyes became red. *How could Rāma, who had given away the kingdom to his younger brother at the behest of a stone-hearted stepmother, tolerate a heartless Vāli abducting his younger brother's wife?* Rāma told Sugreeva, "Even if all the living beings in all the fourteen worlds come and try to protect Vāli, the arrow dispatched from my bow will destroy him. The kingdom as well as your wife will be given back to you. Show me the place where Vāli lives." Sugreeva became very happy like one who had sighted the shore, lifted by a wave of ecstasy from a sea of sorrow.

Sugreeva, however, was cautious. *He conferred with all his vānaras along with Hanuman who was a combination of knowledge, justice, statecraft and righteousness.* Hanuman said, "Dear Sugreeva! I can understand what is in your mind. You are afraid that Rāma and Lakshmana may not have the strength to defeat Vāli. Please listen to me carefully. On his big hands and feet Rāma has the markings of Sankha (Conch) and Cakra (Disc) which no one else in this world has. Therefore, realise that this Rāma with powerful red eyes and a bow in his hand is none other than Mahāvishnu born in this world to uphold justice and dharma. Who else except him has the strength to break the bow used by the omnipotent Lord Siva who can curtail the life-span of even Yama? Sugreeva, my lord! Once upon a time, Vāyu who brought me into this world, said to me, 'You must serve Lord Mahāvishnu. That will be equivalent to doing great penance and will do both of us good.' When I wanted to know how to find Mahāvishnu, Vāyu replied, 'He will appear when all of you are suffering from grief. As soon as you see Him, you will begin to love Him'. *The moment I saw Rāma, my body as well as my bones began to melt. Now I know for certain that Mahāvishnu has come in the form of Rāma.* Therefore, why should there be any misgivings about him? In case you want to know the strength of Rāma, there is an easy method. On the way, we have the Marāmarams. Rāma will demonstrate how he can pierce one of these huge trees with his powerful arrow." Happily agreeing with Hanuman, Sugreeva approached Rāma.

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4. THE SEVEN TREES

Taking Rāma and Lakshmana by a particular route, Sugreeva told them, "There are seven huge tall trees reaching the sky. If your arrow can pierce one of these seven trees, it will dispel from my mind all sorrow and anxiety." Understanding the guileless Sugreeva, Rāma smiled, twanged his bow with his powerful hands, and went up to the huge trees which could not be measured by the human mind. These seven trees were so strong that even if millenniums went by they would undergo no change. Even if all the worlds were destroyed, these trees would survive. These seven trees (known as Marāmarams) like a cluster of seven mountains were so tall that even the moon and the sun had to perform penance to go over them. The trees were so lofty that Lord Brahma, too, would feel proud to claim that He had seen the leaves sprouting at the top of those trees. Looking at the huge tall trees that gave plenty of shade, one wondered whether it was not because of the cool shade given by them that the seven horses of Soorya were able to secure adequate rest and run their daily course in the celestial orbit without fatigue. *As for their longevity, these seven trees could be compared to the perennial Védas. Even if heavy winds shook these trees, their fragrant flowers, leaves and ripe and unripe fruits would never fall on the earth. They would, however, fall into the celestial River Ganga and would ultimately reach the sea. These trees could be compared to the incomprehensible Lord Tirumal, because they went beyond the worlds measured by Him! Just as Vāli's hatred for Sugreeva was not less than Sugreeva's hatred for Vāli, the hardness of one tree was not less than the hardness of the other.* Each of these seven trees was separated from the other by a yōjana. They were spread out far and wide, and each one of them was taller and broader than the Meru!

Rāma saw the seven trees. Wanting to shoot a powerful arrow at them, he twanged his bow so hard that the deafening sound frightened the Devas who feared that the dissolution of the universe was imminent. The sound was so loud that it reached all the worlds, the regions protected by the eight elephants, and the world of Lord Brahma. The deafening sound was such that, except Lakshmana, all who were near the bow, including Sugreeva and Hanuman, were so frightened that it would be a shame to describe their plight. The sound made truthful Hanuman and others wonder whether it was after all necessary for the arrow to be dispatched. Rāma finally drew the bow-string tight and shot a powerful arrow. Released by Rāma, the arrow pierced all the seven trees, passed through all the seven nether worlds and returned to Rāma. Fearing that this arrow might again pierce anything seven in number, the seven seas,

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the seven worlds above, the seven sages, the seven horses drawing the chariot of Soorya and even the seven celestial damsels, became terribly frightened. However, after some time, all of them felt reassured that they might not be harmed by Rāma because he always upheld dharma and protected the virtuous! *After watching his prowess, Sugreeva, prostrating himself at the sacred feet of Rāma said, "You are the world as well as the sky. You are yourself the five elements; you are Brahma seated on the lotus; you are the sea, and also Mahāvishnu seen on the ocean of milk; you are the very dharma that wipes out all sins; you who created the world a long time ago, have come to protect this Sugreeva who is like a dog before you.* O king of kings, because of the good deeds done in my previous birth, you have been brought here by providence without any effort on my part. You are like a mother to everyone. I am your faithful servant. Henceforth, there is nothing that will be difficult for me to accomplish." The vānaras who were watching this, sang and danced for joy, and ran hither and thither. They said in a chorus, "We were looking forward to a time when Vāli would be killed. The time has arrived."

5. DUNDUBHI

On the mountain of Rishyamukham, Rāma saw another mountain-like body resting. It was a heap of dry bones without any moisture, as though the bones had been baked a long time ago by the pralaya fire. On seeing the mountain of bones, Rāma wondered whether it was once upon a time Yama's mount! Or whether it was the collection of bones belonging to the huge elephants protecting the eight directions, or whether they were the remnants of a mighty big fish known as Makaram. Rāma said, "O affable Sugreeva, tell me what this is." Sugreeva replied, "These bones belong to a Rākshasa called Dundubhi. This fiend had the vicious character of destroying everyone and grew so huge that it seemed as if he would touch the moon. With his mighty horns, he went to attack Lord Vishnu seated on the ocean of milk. Looking at Dundubhi, the Lord asked, 'What has brought you here?' Dundubhi replied, 'Come and fight with me.' The Lord told him, 'Only Lord Siva who has Ganga on His tuft and whose neck is dark with the deadly Hālāhala poison, is fit to fight with you.' On hearing this, Dundubhi rushed to Lord Siva and said, 'Try and offer me a good fight.' Lord Siva replied that He could not oblige him and that he should go to Devendra for such a fight. Dundubhi approached Devendra who finally told him, 'If you wish to have a long and good fight, you will have to go to Vāli.' Dundubhi happily came to

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Rishyamukham, challenged the king of the vānaras, and began demolishing the mountain. Vāli became furious and started fighting with Dundubhi.

"Vāli and Dundubhi fought with such speed moving from left to right and right to left, that none could make out one from the other. Wherever, or in whichever world they fought, they fought fearlessly, falling down, and getting up quickly. Rākshasās and vānaras fled the moment they saw these two fighting. Fire raged at the site of their fight. Even the ocean and the mountains lost their natural tendencies because of the fight. With the strength of his arms, Vāli plucked Dundubhi's huge and powerful horns and started beating the Rākshasa with the very same horns. Dundubhi shouted so loudly that the clouds thundered. Vāli punched Dundubhi with the fierceness with which a thunderbolt would hit a mountain. Dundubhi's head was injured. His huge legs were broken. Blood started gushing from his cavernous mouth. Vāli lifted Dundubhi and spun him with such speed that his blood was spilled in all the eight directions of the world. The strong hands of Vāli finally threw Dundubhi down so hard that the Rākshasa was killed. Dundubhi's body which was stinking, went up into the sky and finally fell inside the hermitage of Rishyamukham where Sage Mātanga was doing penance. The sage became angry because his hermitage was defiled. He cursed Vāli that if he entered the hermitage, his head would burst and he would die. It is this curse that has helped me to live here safely." After listening to everything, Rāma asked Lakshmana to throw away Dundubhi's skeleton. Lakshmana pushed it with his toe and it moved all the way to Brahmaloka and fell again in its original place!

6. THE SIGHT OF SEETA'S JEWELS

As Rāma was resting in a fine garden, Sugreeva approached him and said, "Lord, there is something I wish to tell you. A few days ago, when we had assembled here, wicked Rāvana was passing this way. The lady who was his captive could be your wife, Seeta. She was some distance away. She wept aloud looking at these forests and mountains. We do not know whether she wanted to indicate to her husband the direction in which she was being taken. She bundled her jewels in a piece of cloth and dropped them along with her rain-like tears, probably as messengers of her thoughts. We caught the jewels. We have carefully preserved them. We will show them to you. Please see whether they belong to Seeta." Sugreeva (whose sweet love for Rāma was like honey mixed with milk) brought the jewels. Rāma examined them carefully. To say that his body melted like wax in a raging fire would be inadequate. He looked at the jewels intently, as if he were consuming nectar that added strength to his life. It was

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difficult to describe his state on seeing them. For Rāma all the jewels that had adorned her limbs looked like her respective limbs!

Whether the sight of those jewels restored Rāma's lost senses or took away his life; whether looking at these jewels, Rāma's body became cool as if smeared with sandalwood paste or was burnt by the fire of separation, it is hard for me (Kamban) to say. When he smelt the jewels they had the fragrance of flowers. When he wore them they were like his upper cloth! Looking like bright sandalwood paste smeared on his body, they resembled a cloth printed with flowers! His tears came out like a flood. The hair on his body stood erect. *It is impossible to say whether there was sweat on his mighty shoulders or whether it dried up because of the scorching heat. How can I (Kamban) describe Rāma's condition then?* After he saw the jewels, he almost lost his consciousness due to the heat that spread in his body like the spread of poison! As he was about to fall, Sugreeva held him and said in sorrow, "O Rāma, I am indeed a sinner. I almost took away your life by showing you these jewels. Please do not suffer from sorrow and lose your senses. I assure you that I will go beyond this world if need be, find Rāvana and the others, make them recognise my strength and give your noble wife back to you. Fie on the twenty shoulders and ten heads of Rāvana! Can the seven worlds match your single arrow? Please do stay here. I shall go to the fourteen worlds, search for Seeta, break the head of the Rākshasās who took her and restore your wife to you. We are here to do your bidding. You also have Lakshmana of immense strength. Your prowess is such that even the three worlds cannot ignore your command. Why should you then underestimate yourself? Usually, those who are great do not speak of their own greatness. Only their actions are seen by the world. O Rāma, you are dharma. There is nothing beyond you. What is there that is impossible for you? Why do you grieve as though you cannot accomplish anything? Only the combination of the three Lords, Brahma, Siva and Vishnu can match you. Alone, not one of them is your equal! I do not mind even if my little problem stands unattended for the present. Let us go fast and try to redeem Seeta from Rāvana's clutches."

Sugreeva's words made Rāma recover from his stupor and grief. He opened his beautiful eyes which were full of tears and said, "You who possess handsome mountainous shoulders! Please understand my plight. Though I am still alive with this bow in my hand, Seeta has thrown away her jewels. Should this happen to any chaste woman? When Seeta is waiting in agony for my arrival, I have not done anything to relieve her of her sufferings. Instead, I am whiling away my time, wailing before huge mountains, lakes and these jewels of Seeta. Without any shame

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I roam about with my huge bow. People of this world would rather lay down their lives trying to protect even unknown women from their tormentors. Whereas, I have not been able to relieve the sufferings of Seeta who relies solely on me. My forefathers had performed many outstanding feats. They had dug out the dark ocean; they had brought Ganga to this world; and they had made huge tigers and deer drink water from the same source. Whereas, I am unable even to remove the grief of my wife! Emperor Dasaratha, my father, relieved Devendra of his enemy the powerful Camparāsura of whom even Yama was afraid. Look at me! I have brought great shame upon myself despite the bow in my hand. *I was afraid that if my father's words became untrue, I would be censured. So I entered the forest without accepting the crown. But now, I have invited greater censure by allowing Rāvana to abduct my wife!"*

When Sugreeva with his words of comfort drew Rāma out of his sea of sorrow, the latter said, "Though your words have partly consoled me, they have not succeeded in removing my grief. Can anything be greater for me than my self-respect? I will even give up my life to wipe out the slur on me; but I shall do so only after I have resolved your problem." At this stage, Hanuman intervened, "Lord, I have something to tell you. I request you to listen carefully. Unless Vāli is slain and Sugreeva is made the king of the vānaras, and a vānara army is raised, it will be difficult to search for the abode of Rāvana and his ferocious Rākshasās. We do not know where Rāvana is; whether he is in the mountains, or the celestial region or some other place! None of us can see him because we are mere mortals. The Rākshasās, can in a moment visit all the worlds. They are omnipotent. Spreading everywhere like evil, they take away whatever they want. If a search is to be made step by step, by going from one place to another, it may take a number of years to find Seeta. Whereas, with a simultaneous search in all the worlds, she can be found quickly. This can be done only by our vānara hordes who are seventy vellams in number. If all of them assemble, they can cover the whole world like the ocean overflowing at the end of a yuga. Therefore, I feel that it would be best to slay Vāli first and then search for Seeta." Rāma agreed with Hanuman and said, "Let us proceed to the abode of Vāli." Sugreeva and his four ministers (Hanuman, Tāran, Neelan and Nalan), accompanied by Rāma and Lakshmana, left for Kishkinda.

7. THE SLAYING OF VĀLI

Along with Rāma and Lakshmana who looked like two lions, Sugreeva appearing like a fierce yāli walked with his four ministers who resembled two swift-moving

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elephants and two tigers. They all went in a group into a thick forest abounding in various kinds of mighty trees. The path they traversed was full of natural swings made of trees for the playful vānara women, sandalwood trees, mountains with waterfalls and gardens full of shanbhaga trees. *The clouds which were quietly resting on the mountain tops, suddenly 'woke up' and started moving, due to the sound that came from the majestic footsteps of Rāma and Lakshmana as they sped along with the vānaras.* The snakes became frightened and fled from the mountains full of surabha trees. All the animals including ferocious elephants, lions and tigers started running in panic! The elephants which ran amuck, uprooted the aquila and sandalwood trees. These in turn brought down plenty of beehives. The honey that flowed profusely from them made the pathway slippery and difficult to negotiate. *The hilly terrain traversed by Rāma and Lakshmana was full of gems, the glitter of which extended up to the sky, like a spreading fire! As if to put out this fire with water, a layer of gold was seen all over!* The mountains through which Sugreeva and the others walked, were full of lakes into which the celestial Ganga flowed, while rivulets flowed from the mountain forests. Elephants ran in front of the lakes. Sparrows were found in the rice fields, while female monkeys jumped around the trees. The stars, the rainbow seen in the sky, the white moon and other planets that orbited in the firmament, were all 'drawn' towards the mountain, full of fragrant cardamom and flowing honey! Sugreeva and his ministers accompanied by Rāma and Lakshmana, travelled a distance of nearly ten yojanas and finally reached Vāli's abode. Rāma looked at Sugreeva and said, "Go and challenge Vāli to a fight. While you fight with venomous Vāli, I will stand unseen and will shoot an arrow at him." Rāma's words made Sugreeva happy. He raised such a deafening sound that the ocean was frightened, the clouds were put to shame, the people of the earth began to sweat and the Devas were frightened! Accepting Rāma's suggestion, Sugreeva stood facing Kishkinda. Slapping his shoulders and thighs, he challenged Vāli and shouted, "Come and fight with me. I shall kill you." The loud words of Sugreeva penetrated the strong ears of Vāli who was sleeping in Kishkinda.

Vāli's left side twitched. He resembled the ocean of milk as he was lying on his bed! Like a ferocious lion hearing the noise made by a mad elephant, he heard the roar of Sugreeva! Possessing mountainous shoulders, Vāli laughed aloud at the thought of his brother, Sugreeva, coming for a fight. His laughter was so loud that the fourteen worlds and the eight directions became nervous. Wanting to destroy Sugreeva, Vāli got up swiftly. The breeze that emanated from his movement pushed down even the Kishkinda mountain. His anger made the hair on his body stand erect with sparks of

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fire coming out of them. Smoke was seen in his heavy breath. Vāli who was furious, clapped his hands loudly. The sound, louder than thunder, frightened the eight elephants protecting the eight directions. The celestial world trembled and the mountains crumbled. His loud words, "I have come! I have come!" were heard in all directions. The speed with which he got up and came out created a terrible storm. He gnashed his teeth with such fury that fire emanated from them. When he slapped his shoulders, the shining gems that fell looked like sparks of lightning falling on the ground. Vāli appeared so frightening that he resembled the raging pralaya fire. *Sweet Tāra, his wife, stood before him, countenancing his anger. Allowing even her hair to be singed by the fire from his eyes, she stopped him from proceeding for the fight. Vāli told her, "You who are like a peacock living in the mountain! Do not stop me. Allow me to go. I shall destroy Sugreeva who has called me for a fight, consume his life, and return." Tāra told Vāli, "My dear hero, please realise that Sugreeva once ran away defeated by you. He has not suddenly acquired any new strength. How is it then, that he has again called you for a fight? It is because, he has obtained the assistance of some other mighty person."* Vāli did not yield. He said, "Even if all living beings in all the three worlds get together and confront me, I can defeat them. I will prove this to you. Dear Tāra! Please listen to me. Long ago, the Mandara mountain was used for churning the ocean of milk by the Devas and Asuras with the serpent Vāsuki for a rope. Lord Mahāvishnu had taken the form of a tortoise and had propped up the mountain so that it would not sink into the ocean. Can you afford to forget that when the Devas and Asuras became tired, it was I who churned the ocean single-handed with ease and obtained nectar for them. Even Yama is afraid of me. How can there be anyone who can help Sugreeva? Even those who have obtained strength from penance will have to forfeit half of their strength to me if they foolishly stand before me. When that is so, can anyone fight with me and win? Please give up your fear."

Tāra said, "My dear king! Friends tell me that recently a person known as Rāma, who has become a dear friend of Sugreeva, has vowed to kill you." Vāli was pained to hear her words. He told her, "What a sinner you are! It was this world, unable to put an end to the evils here, that had invited Rāma to remove them. You have uttered words which are a blasphemy to Rāma who has shown the path of dharma by his very actions. What you have said does no credit to that great person who can know the purpose of this birth as well as the next. What does he gain by killing me? At the behest of his stepmother, Kaikeyi, Rāma happily gave his entire kingdom away to his younger brother. Instead of extolling such a person, how can you find fault with him?

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Even if all the stable worlds unite against him, does Rāma need the help of anyone except his fierce bow? Do you think that this incomparable Rāma, will strike friendship with a monkey? Rāma is one who considers that he has no life other than his brothers. He is like a sea of compassion. Will he shoot an arrow during a fight between me and my brother?" Reassuring his wife, Vāli added, "Stay here for some time. I shall go, take the life of Sugreeva, frighten his friends and return. Do not be worried." After these words of Vāli, Tāra was quiet, afraid to say anything more. Vāli rose like the sun seen on the peak of the eastern mountain. He looked handsome with his two shoulders which resembled the Meru. All those who saw him were frightened as he came out of his abode like Lord Narasimha emerging from the big pillar pointed out by the treacherous Asura, Hiranyan! Vāli shouted back at his brother who had challenged him for a fight. *The din and bustle created by the two brothers pervaded the whole world like the three steps of Trivikrama covering the entire universe.*

Watching Vāli, and Sugreeva, Rāma told Lakshmana, "Look at them carefully. Let us not concern ourselves with the Devas or Rākshasās. Is there any sea, cloud, wind or fire that can match their bodies?" Lakshmana replied, "Just to take away the life of his brother, this Sugreeva has brought a fierce Yama (you). Dear brother, it is not good to trust persons who do unworthy deeds. This Sugreeva stands ready to kill his elder brother. What good will he do to others?" Rāma told Lakshmana, "Listen! Is it possible for you to talk of these mad animals in the same tenor in which you speak about the good and bad characters of human beings? *If all younger brothers born from the womb of a mother revere their elder brothers, how can Bharata ever become the greatest of them all? My dear Lakshmana! There are only a few who are good in this world. There are many who are not. What we have to seek in our friends is only what they can give us. Who is there whom we can consider to be faultless?"* As Rāma and Lakshmana were exchanging their views, Sugreeva and Vāli looking like two mountains approached each other for the fight. They resembled two regional elephants or two strong lions confronting each other. They came close and moved rapidly a number of times from right to left. *The whirlwind caused by the movement of these two made the world spin like the wheel of a potter! Like two planets coming close to each other, the angry pair, approached each other.* The shoulders and legs of these two hit against one another with such force that sparks were seen flying into the sky. Born from the same womb, Vāli and Sugreeva who had powerful shoulders, started fighting as if for the sake of a female. The two fought as fiercely as the two Asuras, Sundan and Upasundan who had once clashed for the sake of a beautiful damsel known as

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Tilōttamai. *How can we compare the fight between Vāli and Sugreeva (two forms of fury) when we have not seen an ocean fighting another ocean, or two Meru mountains fighting each other?* The fire that emanated from the eyes of these two vānara kings burnt the clouds and mountains. All the Nāgas were frightened. The celestials disappeared in panic. Vāli and Sugreeva moved with such rapidity and ferocity that they appeared to be fighting in the sky, on the peaks of mountains and outside the very boundaries of the eight directions of this world. Their wounds started bleeding because of the way they were biting and hitting each other. The din created by their fight was more than five times the sound made by the seven oceans in the ten directions. The sound arising from Vāli and Sugreeva hitting each other's shoulders and chest was so great that it resembled the pralaya thunder. The two heroes pounced upon and bit each other. Blood gushing from their biting mouths fell in all directions. The stars in the sky looked red like the planet Mars because of the blood splashed on them. The fierce attack with their mighty arms made Vāli's shoulders and Sugreeva's bosom emit sparks of fire like the sparks coming from a strong piece of iron hammered by the blacksmith at the forge.

Vāli and Sugreeva pushed each other with their chests! They hit each other forcefully with their hands and attacked each other with trees and even portions of mountains. They would suddenly shout and stare at each other with fire in their eyes. They would catch and throw one another far away. They would rise and show their chests to each other. After receding for some distance, they would come back and fight! Like kites swinging in the sky, they would swing to the right for some time and then to the left. They would slip from each other, fall on the ground, and again get up to fight. They would tie and drag each other with their tails so strongly that it appeared as though their bones would break. They would dig into each other's flesh so fiercely that caves would be formed in their bodies. During their fight, there was such a heap of trees, mountains and other objects, that they screened the sky. Their fight became so intense that red fire started emanating from the white hair on their bodies. Even the Devas were frightened. *At this stage, Vāli the possessor of long and powerful shoulders, with the help of his hands and nails, struck his younger brother like a lion destroying an elephant during a fight.*

Vāli's prowess made Sugreeva sad. He came and bowed before Rāma with a depressed mind. Rāma looked at him and said, "Do not grieve. I could not distinguish you from your brother. Wear a garland of flowers around your neck so that I can

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identify you. Go back and fight." Sugreeva wore a garland looking like one made of stars, and went to Vāli to fight again. He attacked and hit him many times with a roar that frightened thunder, tigers, and even Vāli. *Wondering why Sugreeva who had earlier gone away defeated, had returned, Vāli became infuriated. With a derisive laugh, he hit Sugreeva's vulnerable parts with such force that Sugreeva became giddy. He began taking deep breaths and was almost giving up his very life. Blood started gushing from his ears and eyes. Sugreeva had no choice except to look towards Rāma. Vāli in the mean time lifted Sugreeva with his two hands wanting to throw him on the ground. It was at this point that Rāma pulled the string of his bow and shot an arrow at Vāli. Vāli's chest which was stronger than the combination of the four powerful elements of water, fire, wind and earth, was pierced by Rāma's arrow with the ease with which a ripe succulent banana fruit is pierced by a sharp needle. What more can be said about the power of Rāma's arrow?* The moment the arrow pierced Vāli, he fell down with the force with which the Meru would have been thrown by the pralaya wind. His grip on Sugreeva loosened. But his grip on the arrow did not. He held it firmly. He tried to get up swearing to smash the zenith of the sky and throw it on the earth. Shouting that he would make all the eight directions spin, he furiously attempted to chip off the base of the earth itself! He hit the ground with his hand. He looked all around, emitting fire from his eyes. He held the fierce arrow with his two hands and tried to remove it from his chest with the help of his legs and tail. When he did not succeed, he felt dejected. He rolled on the ground with excruciating pain. He started wondering who could have shot an arrow like this. First he thought it was done by the Devas and then dismissed the idea because he felt they were not capable of sending an arrow that could pierce his chest. He laughed and said, "Who could have done this?" He told himself, "Could this have been done by one who had the collective strength of the Trinity of Gods? Could this weapon be the Disc of Lord Vishnu, or Lord Siva's Trident or Devendra's Thunderbolt? How did it get the strength to pierce my chest? I do not think this arrow could have been released from a bow. Probably some great sages must have empowered this arrow with their words and hurled it." Vāli again thought, "What is the use of suspecting several persons? I shall try to pluck this arrow with my hands, legs and toes and then find out the name of the mighty person who dispatched it."

Using all his determination and strength, Vāli finally took out the arrow. The Devas and Asuras who watched the scene were amazed. As soon as the arrow was pulled out, blood gushed out of Vāli's wound (with the loud sound of the waves of

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an ocean), like a river flowing through forests and mountains and finally joining the sea. On seeing this, Sugreeva was struck by brotherly affection. He shed tears and fell on the ground! Vāli tried to break the arrow with his hands but realised that he could not. He got up and tried to read the name which was impressed on the arrow. Finding on it the great name of Rāma who is sacred for all the three worlds and a remedy for the malady of future births, Vāli said to himself, "The Solar dynasty which had all along been following Védic dharma, has forsaken the good old path. Rāma, instead of remaining in Ayōdhya and doing righteous deeds, has come to the forest to harm the like of us without facing us in a straight fight with his bow." Vāli, whose agony was like that of a strong elephant fallen and caught in a pit, laughed aloud in disgust wondering, "Probably shooting an arrow like this is dharma! If a leader is to forsake dharma, what will happen to ordinary mortals? Even such a great man like Rāma has gone astray in my case!"

Rāma, who had never deviated from the Védic path and who had set a model for the excellent character required of kings, appeared before Vāli like the very incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Looking at Rāma (holding a bow), emitting sparks of fire from his eyes, Vāli asked him, *"What did you think and what have you done?* O son of that benevolent Dasaratha who had given up his life for the sake of truth and the honour of his race! You appeared as an elder brother to Bharata! Do you think that a wrongful deed done by you can escape condemnation simply because you prevent others from doing wrongful deeds? You are supposed to be not only a mother to this world but its friend, too, and the custodian of dharma. You belong to a great race and you are learned. You are endowed with good character and all your acts are noble. You are strong. You are the master of the three worlds and the protector of even this world. Is it proper for you to do this deed as if you have forgotten everything? O possessor of a handsome form which defies even painting! Are those born in your race exempt from the royal dharma meant for a ruler? *Has separation from that lovely daughter of King Janaka, the swan-like Seeta, your sweet wife who is your very life, upset the balance of your mind?* Have the precepts of Manu ordained that if you were harmed by Rākshasās, you could kill the king of the monkey race? Where have you thrown away your compassion? What fault did you find in me? If you have taken upon yourself this huge sin, who else is there good enough to have name and fame? Has Kaliyuga set in suddenly exclusively for the monkey race in this world? Am I to presume that decency and the resultant excellence are all characteristics to be expected only among weaklings? *For those who are strong, despicable acts seem to be glorified*

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deeds sparing them from censure! You do not need the help of anyone for your victory. You gave away the kingdom you received from your father to your younger brother! Probably you came to this forest, trying to perform a similar deed by taking away my kingdom and giving it to my younger brother. Can there be anything worse than your attempt to do a thing like this? You who do not give yourself up to anger! Is it not a fact that the deeds of heroes are considered heroic? If what you did to me is to be considered heroic, what right have you to be angry with Rāvana, accusing him of improper deeds?

"When two heroes were fighting with each other, you should have treated them alike as your good relations. Instead, you took pity on one and shot an arrow at the other from a place of hiding! Is this dharma? This is nothing but bias shown to an individual; a cowardly act to be condemned. I am neither a burden to you nor am I your enemy. I just do not know what made you give up your culture and do this heartless deed. Upholding justice is possible only by being neutral after considering what is right and wrong. What justice is there when you have helped an individual by discarding impartiality? You have thereby brought a blemish on yourself. It is ridiculous for you to seek the assistance of Sugreeva to destroy your enemy, Rāvana, who abducted Seeta (by using Mārica). *You seem to seek the help of a rabbit, instead of seeking the help of a lion (which can kill an elephant).* Probably, you felt that the moving moon has a blemish on him and wanted to provide a perennial blemish to the sun also, to whose dynasty you belong. I came here to fight because Sugreeva challenged me. You hid yourself and shot an arrow at a person unknown to you. Only after I have fallen do you stand before me like a brave lion. You have failed to uphold the rules laid down in the books or follow the footsteps of your noble forefathers. *O hero, you have not killed Vāli. You have, by your action, destroyed the 'Véli' (fence) that protected dharma.* Your brave archery stands condemned because it has felled me, though I am totally unconnected with one who has taken away your wife. Have you been called a great archer for shooting an arrow at the chest of a weaponless being, that, too, from a place of hiding?" Gnashing his teeth, Vāli spoke angrily emitting fire from his eyes.

Rāma, who stood in front of Vāli, replied, "You went after Māyāvi and entered a cave. Your brother, Sugreeva, became concerned that you were inside for too long. He was about to follow you. The elders in your race stopped him and urged him to be their king. Sugreeva opposed this and said, 'I shall kill that Māyāvi and his kin who killed my elder brother in the cave. Later, I, too, shall die. I do not propose to rule the state after

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the death of my elder brother'. Elderly and learned ministers and great chiefs of the army prevented him from entering the cave and told him, 'Whatever might have happened, you have to take up the task of ruling the state'. That is why Sugreeva accepted the crown. The moment you returned (after killing Māyāvi), Sugreeva became happy. He made obeisance to you and said, 'My dear lord, our vānaras forced me to rule the state. Please take it back'. Even after he explained to you the chain of events that had transpired, you shunned him and his words. Though you realised that he was not at fault, you did not relent. You were angry with him despite his surrender. Disregarding the advice you had from your friends, you proceeded to kill him though he openly prostrated himself in front of you with the words, 'I accept defeat from you. Please stop the fight'. Sugreeva was frightened and ran to the farthest ends of the world. You chased him and tried to kill him without regarding him as your younger brother. Because Sugreeva took shelter in Sage Mātanga's hermitage in Rishyamukham, which is protected from you by a curse, you did not go there, and he survived. *The hallmark of compassion, of being born in a noble family, of bravery and good education, is protecting the chastity of a wife belonging to another.* It is wrong for a real hero to show his anger on a weakling. Destroying a woman's chastity which in fact should be protected, is not dharma. You have failed to think of the effects of your deeds in this birth as well as the next! If you had thought of these things, would you have taken away the wife of your brother? I struck you because you did these wrongful deeds and also because Sugreeva is my dear friend. Even otherwise, it is my duty to protect all from their misery, including those not connected with me."

Vāli replied, "What you have said cannot apply to us vānaras. Our habit is to do whatever we feel like doing. It is your human race that has to give respect to chastity. Lord Brahma has ordained that when a man and a woman marry, they have to remain together; whereas *we* have been created differently by Him. Neither do we have marriages conducted according to the Védas, nor do we have the culture of a family tradition. We follow the direction in which our minds drag us. O vanquisher of all including me! By our norms, I have not committed any crime! Keep this in mind before you judge me." Rāma said, "You and Sugreeva are born as sons of celestials. You know the path of dharma unsullied by sin. You do not belong to the ordinary species of animals. For one like you with a victorious garland, your words are most unbecoming. You know all about the body that contains the five senses. How can you justify your wrongful acts, after knowingly committing them? When a crocodile had caught and pulled the leg of an elephant, did not Lord Mahāvishnu intervene and

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dispense justice by taking the elephant to heaven? Was that elephant not an animal? Did not my fatherly Jatāyu (now in heaven) who fought for wiping the sorrow of Seeta, the king of vultures? I do agree that animals normally do not have the capacity to discriminate between right and wrong. But, in your case, you have clearly proved from the very words that you have uttered, that there is nothing you are not aware of regarding dharma. *Even though human beings are considered to belong to the highest order among living creatures, if they are unable to differentiate between right and wrong, they are only animals. If, on the contrary, animals can follow and practise the rules ordained by Manu, then they are equal to the celestials!* You attained the collective strength of all the four elements (earth, water, wind and fire) brought forth by Lord Tirumāl because of the penance you did to propitiate Lord Siva. In this world there are persons who have followed the path of dharma among the faulted and the so-called low born. At the same time, even among the Devas and sages who have done penance, there are sinners. *Therefore, the superiority or inferiority of a person depends upon the good or bad deed done and not by birth.* Knowing all this, you have destroyed the chastity of another's wife." Vāli who listened to Rāma, asked him, "O noble one, conceding that I have committed a crime as asserted by you, what was the need for you to hide like a cruel hunter and shoot an arrow at me instead of standing before me and fighting in a proper way?" Coming forward to answer, Lakshmana said, "When Sugreeva surrendered, Rāma assured him that he would kill you for giving up dharma. Lest you, too, should come and surrender before Rāma, he shot the arrow at you, from a place of hiding."

King Vāli who had learnt a great deal from noble ones even from his childhood, accepted the words of Lakshmana. Realising that Rāma would not as a result of a changed and grief-stricken mind, do an unrighteous deed, Vāli became calm. Brushing aside base thoughts, he saluted Rāma with his head and said, "Possessing great qualities, you are like the very mother to all living creatures, showing them compassion and leading them to the righteous path. It is very difficult for ordinary ones like us who are like curs, to appreciate your noble ways. Please put up with my sinful actions. You may dismiss me as a monkey who cannot examine things properly. Please do not take to heart the words uttered by one who is indebted to you. You are the remedy for this disease of my birth, which can only bring me sorrow. You are the charitable Lord who can give boons. You have made me realise the truth of life as I lie here like a faithful dog with my life about to be taken away. *You are the very Trinity of Gods. You are the foremost. You are everything. You are both sin and dharma, and enmity and friendship!* Is there anything that can be called dharma other than your arrow which penetrated my strong chest, took away my life, and destroyed

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all the incomparable boons that I had received from Lord Siva? O exceptional Rāma! Great seers have said that you are the universal cause present in all the six seasons and the effects thereof; you are the flower as well as the fragrance it gives; and you are all objects, the living as well as the non-living. I, too, have realised this truth. I do not think it will be difficult for me to attain Mōksha because I have seen in you the very form of imperishable dharma. There is nothing more that I have to see. All my sins have come to an end today. *I have earned my passage to the celestial world through the punishment meted out to me by you. O king loftier than the sky! My brother Sugreeva invited you, held consultations with small monkeys for a long time with the object of killing me, and got for himself a worthless kingdom. But he has given me the kingdom of God! Is there anything better that he could have done for me?*

"I wish to make a plea! My brother, Sugreeva, has the habit of drinking wine made from forest flowers, losing his balance and misbehaving. *On such occasions, please do not be angry with him and do not use on him the deadly arrow which you shot at me. There is one more thing that I seek from you. If your younger brothers make fun of my younger brother, Sugreeva, for killing his elder brother, I request you to prevent them from doing so. Let it be understood that if I have fallen here by your arrow, it is only because fate had ordained that I should be punished for my sins.* O brave one! Whatever help I could or could not have rendered you, I feel I have not been fortunate enough to have tied that deceitful Rāvana with my tail and brought him before you; an act which a monkey like me would have enjoyed. There is no point now in talking about past events. As for the future, I would suggest to you that it is only Hanuman who can execute anything that you want done. *Please consider Hanuman as the bow in your hand and think of my brother, Sugreeva, as your own brother, Lakshmana, who implicitly obeys you. With Hanuman and Sugreeva, you will get back Seeta because there is none like them."*

Embracing Sugreeva with both hands, Vāli told him, "Brother, there is something which I want to tell you. O possessor of mountainous shoulders, listen to me and act accordingly. Do not grieve over my death. Realise that Rāma is the incarnation of the Lord mentioned by the Védas, the sages and Lord Brahma. It is only with the object of establishing dharma and destroying the wicked that Rāma has come to this world with a bow in his hand. All the sacred living beings in this world will always be thinking of and uttering the name of Rāma. There is no greater testimony to Rāma's prowess than the fact that he has been able to kill me. Even those who constantly commit unpardonable

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sins will reach the highest celestial region if they are killed by the arrows of benevolent Rāma. When this is so, how easy it should be to reach heaven for those who serve Rāma and fall at his divine feet. My dear Sugreeva, with the help of providence, you will obtain happiness in this world as well as in the next. Henceforth you have to act, without hesitation, according to the wishes of Rāma, the very incarnation of Lord Tirumāl, and attain greatness in all the three worlds. Cast away your ignorance and stupor, the two qualities common to monkeys. Always remember the help rendered to you by Rāma. You must be prepared even to lay down your life for his sake. Scrupulously do the bidding of Rāma who is the Lord of lords, and emancipate yourself from the formidable chain of birth and death! *Do not be carried away by the fact that you have become the ruler of a kingdom. Let not that euphoria blur your judgement and make you think of Rāma lightly. Always consider that kings can be compared to a burning fire. Such an attitude is good for you because that will make you fear and obey the wishes of Rāma!"* Handing Sugreeva over to Rāma, Vāli saluted him with folded hands over his head, and said, "O son of Dasaratha! This Sugreeva will be yours along with all his relatives." Vāli then looked at Sugreeva's mighty face and said, "Bring my son, Angada, here."

Angada, the beloved son of Vāli, was brought before him. Angada had so far neither seen anyone suffering from grief, nor known how a grief-stricken being would look. Arriving like a full moon, Angada saw his dear father lying in a sea of blood instead of his usual bed of flowers. When broad–shouldered Angada, arrived, with his ear-rings shining like the star and the moon, and saw his father in this state, he shed hot tears of blood and fell on him like a star falling on the moon which had fallen from the sky to the earth. Angada cried aloud, "My dear father, though you have not done any harm to anybody in this huge world, you have attained this sorrowful state. Yama has dared to come to you fearlessly even after seeing your face. Who will tame this Yama in future? Rāvana who had defeated the eight elephants in eight directions, used to tremble whenever he remembered your strong and handsome tail. Hereafter, will he not cast off his fear? O my lord, after your death, who will fulfil the request of the Devas for churning the ocean of milk again? Your crimson hands would salute nothing but the sacred feet of Lord Siva! It was only because you churned the ocean of milk and gave the nectar *to the Devas that they are* still alive. But you (who gave the nectar to them) are dying. Can there be anyone more charitable than you?" Angada went on wailing, giving expression to his sorrow.

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On seeing the grief-stricken Angada, Vāli was like wax melting in fire. He hugged his son and told him, "You should not grieve hereafter. *All this is the result of the good done to me by Rāma! The cycle of birth and death has been there since ages in all the three worlds. Because of the penance done by me, this exemplary Rāma who stands before us has freed me from that age-old malady. This great Rāma is sending me to heaven. My dear son, you have just crossed your childhood. If you listen to my words, you will realise that the one who is standing before us with a bow in his hand is God Himself in human form with none above Him. He is the ideal remedy for the disease of our attachment to life. Prostrate yourself before Rāma and receive his blessings.* Even the slightest thought that he brought about the end of my life should be banished from your mind. You must now strengthen your life by trying to help Rāma when he fights his enemies. I want you to fall at the lotus feet of Rāma, the protector of dharma and the benefactor of all living beings in this world." The mountain-shouldered king, Vāli, held his son, Angada, with his huge hands. Showing him to Rāma, he said, "This impeccable son of mine (with strong shoulders) is to the black Rākshasās (possessing shining spears), what fire is to a bundle of cotton. He is now surrendering to you totally." Angada, accordingly prostrated himself in front of Rāma. As a token of accepting Angada, Rāma took his own sword and gave it to him. The seven worlds praised Rāma. Later, Vāli's spirit went to the farthest heaven, leaving behind his mortal remains. Immediately, Vāli's grip on Rāma's arrow, loosened. The arrow instantly went up towards the sky, got itself washed in the sacred waters of the sea and returned to the quiver which never left Rāma's shoulders. After Vāli reached heaven, Rāma held the hands of Sugreeva and took Angada away.

Hearing of her husband's death, Tāra came and fell on Vāli's body. Kunkumam-paste-like blood, which was gushing out of the huge chest of Vāli, spread on Tāra's bosom and tresses. She fell and rolled on his chest like a streak of lightning seen in the red sky. She wept aloud. The sound of the flute and the music coming from the yāzh or the veena were no match for her wailing. Feeling sad for her husband, she broke down. She pushed the tresses that fell on her chest with her two hands and went on weeping, giving expression to all her sentiments. She cried aloud and said, "O my dear hero, you have all along been my life and heart. I used to rest for days together on your formidable mountainous shoulders without ever being exposed to the shoreless sea of sorrow! But, today, I am full of dread seeing you in this condition. O my dear, you never opposed me! Will you not take away this Tāra, too, who is not dead even after this tragedy? Does not Yama realise that he is alive

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because he consumed the nectar of immortality that you gave him? Is he so mean as to forget the help rendered by you? How can you be so totally devoid of action that you lie here without performing your customary worship of Lord Siva, three times a day, with fresh flowers brought with devotion from different parts of the world? You were used to sleeping on a bed made of flowers and soft sheets. But today, I see you lying on the bare ground, not talking even to me.

"What crime have I committed to make you shun me? You seem to be enjoying yourself happily, having gone to heaven, even though you told me when you were alive that I was your very life. Does it mean that you, who never lied, have uttered a lie? *If it was a fact that I was in your heart, the arrow that took away your life should have taken away mine, too; or else, you, too, should have been alive like me. Because neither of these has happened, we are not in each other's heart!* Probably the Devas are now treating you with their hospitality, remembering the help you rendered them earlier, when you gave them the nectar of immortality. *Would you not have similarly given away all your wealth to Sugreeva, if only Rāma (who shot you from a concealed place) had asked for it?* Even when you were getting ready to go for the fight, I told you that Rāma had come to help Sugreeva. You dismissed me by saying that Rāma would never do it, and then you went for the fight. You, who ought to have lived for a long time, are dead. I wonder when am I going to see you again! How can your chest (which can pulverize the Meru) be pierced by an arrow? Is this an illusion created by the Devas, or is the one who is lying here (dead) a different Vāli and not you?" Tāra called her son and said, "My dear Angada, your father's brother, Sugreeva was once proud of being known as Vāli's brother. Now because of the feud with him, your father is dead and our happy life has also ended. Rāma, a benevolent archer, has done something which no hero ought to have done. The touchstone to measure the greatness of a righteous person is the deed that he does." Tāra went on wailing thus and stood dazed in grief. The mighty Hanuman who always followed the path of justice, approached the vānara women who were with Tāra, and requested them to take her back to the palace of Kishkinda. After that, he made Angada do the obsequies for the departed soul and conveyed everything to Rāma. *The sun which uproots darkness with its powerful rays, reached the western hill. The setting sun appeared with a red face because of Vāli's blood sprayed everywhere.* While the sun disappeared behind the mountain, the charitable Rāma sorrowfully rested in a place, thinking of the state of Seeta and crossed the formidable sea of night with great difficulty.

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8. STATECRAFT

Soorya was happy that his son (Sugreeva) was to be crowned. With his red 'hands' he opened the doors made of lotus petals so that Lord Tirumāl could come out of His dwelling-place and crown him! Rāma told Lakshmana, "Dear brother, I entrust you with the task of crowning Sugreeva with your hands after observing the rituals." Lakshmana took the crown from Rāma and asked Hanuman to collect the materials required for the crowning without delay. Hanuman acted accordingly. Sacred water for bathing Sugreeva and all other materials were got ready by him. After the preparatory work, Sugreeva was finally crowned by Lakshmana in accordance with the procedures laid down in the books, amidst the chanting of the Védas by righteous sages. Sugreeva, with the golden crown on his head, came and prostrated himself at Rāma's sacred feet. After embracing Sugreeva, Rāma offered a few words of advice. *He said, "Dear Sugreeva, go from here to the citadel of Kishkinda and perform all tasks properly after examining everything in detail, taking into consideration the responsibilities undertaken by you. Let all things be done according to rule. Along with Angada, may you live long. Select as your ministers those who have distinguished themselves with knowledge based on truth. Your army chiefs must be blemishless. You must rule without any fault or slip, moving with your ministers and others in such a way that they neither come too close to you, nor leave you and go far away. Take care that they worship you like God. If there is a smoke of discontentment in some quarters, you have to detect through your intelligence, the fire beneath. Along with your goodness, you have to employ the strategy and statecraft mentioned in books. Do not overlook the talents of even those who are inimical to you. Show a smiling face and talk to them sweetly.*

"The most important thing that needs your constant vigilance and protection is the wealth of your state which might make even the affluent celestials cast an evil eye. People in this world are of three categories; friends, enemies and those who are neutral. Do not think evil of any of these three groups, nor harm them. *Even though others may carry tales about them to you, do not retaliate with harsh words. Do not covet the property of others. Do not insult or hurt anyone physically weak. Only because I transgressed this rule was I put to great difficulties and thrown into a sea of sorrow by that Kooni. Remember that women may be the cause of death (as in the case of Vāli) and suffering (as in our case). Subjects must be protected in such a manner that they should say of the ruler, 'He is not only our king! He is our mother who has brought us forth'!*

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While it shall be your natural duty to protect one and all, if ever any harm is done to the country by any one of them, you should punish the evil-doer without transgressing dharma. Birth and death in this world for all beings are the result of their karma. What is there for me to tell you about others, when it is said that even if Lord Brahma forsakes dharma, that will be the end of Him? *Only the punyam and sins of living beings are responsible for their respective wealth and poverty. Experts do not know of any other reason even from books. Therefore, I advise you to do good deeds which will bring you wealth, and eschew bad deeds that will bring you poverty.* My dear Sugreeva, administer the state properly and with distinction. Meet me with your ocean-like army after the rainy season is over. You may now go."

Sugreeva replied, "O charitable one! The only fault that one might find with the Kishkinda mountain, which is full of trees and rivulets, is that monkeys live here. Otherwise, this place with its riches and happiness is superior even to the golden world full of mansions. Please take pity on us. Stay here for some time and allow us to do your bidding. *We have earned your benevolence by surrendering before you. Without your company, our wealth will not be different from poverty. Please be with us till the arrival of the time of searching for Seeta."* Sugreeva then fell at the feet of Rāma. Smiling at Sugreeva, Rāma said, "It is not proper for persons like us who have taken a vow of abstinence from comforts, to live in a palace. Further, if we are to come and stay in the city of Kishkinda, your time will be spent in looking after us and you will neglect your duty of ruling the state. I had promised Kaikeyi that I would be living for fourteen years in a burning forest and I have come here. I am not prepared to stay in a palace during this period. Have you not seen that there can be no pleasure which I can enjoy without the company of my beloved Seeta? If people are to say, 'Rāma enjoyed himself heartily along with his beloved ones when Seeta was all alone, imprisoned by Rāvana', will not these harsh words last even after all the three worlds are destroyed? *After giving up the duty of protecting my wife and also after discarding the use of my bow to protect dharma, if I were to live with my friends, I should be considered lowly.* I would prefer to do penance and expiate the sin that has caused my separation from Seeta. Brave Sugreeva, go and do all things which ought to be done in a proper manner for administering the state and come to me after four months with your huge army comparable to the waves of an ocean." Sugreeva had nothing to say in reply. Looking at the grief-stricken Rāma who had renounced everything , Sugreeva shed tears. *He prostrated himself before Rāma, who turned affectionately to Vāli's son Angada and advised him, "You have to show your excellent character by not just*

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considering this Sugreeva as your father's younger brother. Do his bidding as if he were your father himself." Rāma then asked Angada to go with Sugreeva. Angada fell at the golden feet of Rāma, and left with Sugreeva. Rāma then looked at Hanuman and said, "You are handsome and brave! You, too, go and render all assistance to Sugreeva." Full of love and a mind that was pure, Hanuman fell at Rāma's feet and said, "I shall stay here and do your bidding." Rāma replied, "Even a kingdom abounding in wealth, and ruled by a king endowed with intelligence, heroism and greatness, is bound to suffer from hardship if it is annexed by another king. Only knowledgeable heroes like you can carry the burden of protecting such a kingdom. Your duty is to stabilize Sugreeva's rule. After successfully accomplishing that task, is there anyone nobler than you who can do all that has to be done for me? You are the living form of dharma. Please go with Sugreeva as desired by me." Hanuman made obeisance to Rāma and left with Sugreeva.

Rāma and Lakshmana went and settled down in another hill. Accepting Rāma's advice, Sugreeva reached the expansive Kishkinda. Along with his ministers and relatives, Sugreeva went to Tāra and took her blessings. Sugreeva ruled Kishkinda with distinction. He always considered Tāra as his mother and Vāli as his father. Vāli's earlier words were taken now as fatherly advice. Treating all the vānaras as his kin, Sugreeva involved them in the administration of his rich kingdom. His writ ran in all the eight directions. With affection and love, Sugreeva made Angada of boundless courage and capabilities the crown-prince, and ruled the state.

9. THE RAINY SEASON

The travelling of the sun from north to south (Dakshināyanam) even before Hanuman was sent in search of Seeta, appeared as if an earlier messenger, the sun, was moving southwards to do the bidding of Rāma. The rainy season set in, and the whole sky was engulfed with dark clouds. The earth looked like a huge black aghal (the bowl of an open lamp) with the sea as the ghee, the Meru as the wick, and the sun as the flame. The blue sky looked dark like Lord Siva's neck holding the Hālāhala poison. The hot rays of the sun became cool. *The venomous dark clouds in the sky spread darkness everywhere and looked like the huge blue sea, like the dark eyes of women annointed with collyrium, like the unkempt hair flowing from their heads, like the bodies of deceitful Rākshasās and also like their treacherous acts and minds!* The clouds which had eagerly drunk the water from the sea, started sparkling with lightning. They looked like huge elephants showing gaping wounds caused by swords during a

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fight. The dark clouds which were soaked with water, appeared like a row of dark blue elephants. The roar from the clouds sounded like the roar from the sea going upwards and spreading into the sky. The frequent streaks of lightning looked like the shining jewels of Devendra and other celestials, and like the burning ovens on mountain tops.

The sky which was darker than any object, looked like a furnace into which the blacksmith (in the guise of the eight regions), amidst a heap of coal (the dark clouds of the rainy season), blew with the aid of bellows (the monsoon wind), creating wild flames of fire. Flashes of lightning appeared like blood-soaked swords taken out of their sheaths by the deceptive Vidyādharas for the purpose of staging a fight, or like the lustrous decorated face-plates of the regional elephants moving from place to place, or like the rays sliced from the sun and kept in the sky, or like the tongues of thunder and the darting tongues of the serpents (supporting the eight directions of the world) coming towards the sky. The rainy wind blew, without any distinction between highland and lowland, over the mountains, ditches, trees and all other places. The monsoon wind blew over the breasts of women who were in agony due to the pangs of separation from their beloved husbands, and caused severe burning! The whole sky was like a battlefield with dust noisily going upwards and concealing the sky, with the flashing of constant lightning, and the generation of thundering sounds like the beating of huge drums. *The incessant downpour of rain on the mountain peaks by the vast clouds emitting lightning, was like the incessant shooting of floral arrows by Manmatha at Rāma who had been separated from Seeta of sweet smiles.* The drops of rain falling between the stones in the mountain, descended fast like arrows from the rainbow seen in the clouds. *The red thunderous fire emanating from the clouds fell scattered like precious gems emitting lustrous fiery rays.* The clouds which poured rain on the huge black stones in the mountains, resembled an army hurling white spears at elephants. The rocks that were split by the force of the lightning that accompanied the downpour of rain looked like elephants, attacked by spears, rolling and falling. *The clouds looked like Manmatha holding a fish-like flag; the rainbow seen on the clouds resembled Manmatha's long bow made of sugarcane; torrents of rain showered from the clouds were like Manmatha's darts; and the waterfalls from the mountains resembled Manmatha's arrows piercing the bodies of those suffering from the pangs of love.* The thundering of the clouds sounded as if the celestial beings were celebrating the imminent destruction of Rāvana and his Rākshasās, because Rāma and the vānaras had joined hands.

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The downpour of water from the clouds could be compared to the flow of tears from the eyes of Seeta when she was abducted by Rāvana. The flashes of lightning resembled Lord Siva's fire-tipped arrows. These flashes as sharp as lustrous véls, were harbingers of the rainy season, depressing the minds of males suffering from the pangs of separation from their mates. *Huge and appalling clouds thundered one after another, poured rain, and mingled together. White and dark clouds followed each other like white and dark elephants fighting among themselves!* The speed of the wind was such that the raindrops came down like arrows from blocks of clouds which clashed against each other like different directions fighting against one another! The branches of the trees which appeared dead all these days, sprouted with life and appeared cheerful like women suddenly regaining life after the return of their husbands who were away. The red trees were without flowers due to the cool sun, while the black lilies faded away. Peacocks danced for joy, but cuckoos were silent as though they had become weak searching for their dear ones. Beetles and wasps of various colours surrounded and swarmed the red kāndal flowers, like rings and bangles set with the nine gems. These nectar-shedding red flowers looked like the folded hands of Mother Earth who wondered at the unique beauty of the rainy season that surpassed even the season of spring. Scarlet insects filled every place on earth, looking like chewed betel leaves spat all over. Like a river flowing fast from the tall Meru and carrying red gold in its flow, streams descending from the mountains in and around Kishkinda, carried in their flow flowers of both kino and cassia trees and mingled with one another. Red flowers and fragrant tender cassia flowers with cochineal insects swarming over them, appeared together. The sight was as if Mother Earth, in appreciation of the melodious music of the bees, was presenting them with gold and gems. The bees gave sweet music that sounded like the music from the yāzh, while the clouds caused lightning and rain, and thundered like the beating of drums. The peacocks resembled women wearing bangles. The red flowers looked like lamps beautifying the dance-hall. The soft black flowers looked like the eyes of the viewers. The speedily moving male and female bees, replicated the rhythmic dance performed by the celestial damsels. The flowers which bloomed were like cymbals set for the melodious music of the bees.

The streams flowing down the mountainous forests looked like milk flowing from the mountainous breasts of Mother Earth to feed her offspring. The konrai (cassia) trees looked like the divine and munificent karpaga trees with tender golden leaves. The bees swarmed the flowers in the dense forest giving a unique pleasure to the onlookers. Male deer, out of excessive lust, rubbed themselves on all the trees they

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came across including trees like sandalwood and aquila. As a result, the bodies of these deer acquired the fragrance of musk and were attracted by the female deer! The black lilies became dull like the eyes of women who had become sad owing to the pangs of separation from their beloved husbands who had gone to far-off lands to acquire wealth. Jasmine flowers burst out like the teeth of smiling women happy at the return of these husbands. The river waters gushing from the mountains appeared to give away gold plentifully as if they were charitable kings. *The deer in the mountain were silently happy, afraid to express it aloud, because Mārica had taken their form to entice Seeta!* The swans dipped and bathed in rain, playing in water with the joy of husbands who were reunited with their wives after long separation. The white storks flying in rows amidst dark clouds looked like a pearl chain on the chest of Lord Tirumāl. *The cranes, flying together in the sky near the seasonal clouds, looked like the upper cloth of Mahāvishnu.* The green grass that had sprouted throughout the earth seemed to indicate the thrill of Mother Earth at the exit of the cruel 'king' of summer who tortured her with heat, and the ushering in of the 'king' of rain who was pleasant and conferred bounties. Peacocks spread their feathers all over the forests. They stood and called for Seeta while the 'eyes' of their feathers appeared to search for her!

The red lotus appeared like the soft feet of women painted with the paste of red cotton. The flowery creepers were as slim as the tender waists of women. Koel birds seemed to be silent during the rainy season because they had called loudly and incessantly for Seeta in all directions at the bidding of Rāma, and had lost their voice! The rain-fed earth produced green grass grazed by the cows which stumbled over mushrooms looking like lumps of curds. The flowers of the pidavam plant appeared like the foam rising from the pots of milk carried by milkmaids whose bosoms were like buds while their words were like honey! Vengai flowers bloomed and gave out the fragrance of the hair of women of the mountain tract. Punnai trees (the wealth of the maritime tract) burst with flowers swarmed by clamorous bees and gave out the fragrance of the hair of fisherwomen. Red lilies (the wealth of the cultivable tract) gave out the fragrance of the hair of farmers' wives. The fragrance of the jasmine creepers of the sylvan tract was similar to the fragrance of the hair of the milkmaids. Struck by Manmatha's floral arrows bountifully supplied by the rainy season, Rāma lost his senses. Disappointed at not being able to see his wife, he could not stand the sight of anyone else. The magnificent incessant rainy season suited sages who had renounced everything in life. The same rainy season, however, aroused pangs of separation in

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Rāma who used to happily embrace Seeta, whose sweet words were sweeter than honey or nectar.

Rāma appeared so weak that anyone seeing him would wonder whether there was any life left in his body. Rāma's love for swan-like Seeta made him cry aloud, "O dark clouds, I still retain my life without even knowing where the Rākshasās have hidden my beautiful Seeta. Though you are full of moisture, do you not possess any kindness? Are you bent upon shaking my life? O clouds! With your long flashes of lightning (appearing like teeth), and with your black colour and thunder, you are like those treacherous and deceitful Rākshasās. You will not rest content till you take away my life." Rāma would turn to the peacocks and say, "Are you not going to bring Seeta back to me? You are harsh! Even though you are aware of my sleeplessness and sorrow, you show your prowess and taunt me." Talking to the creepers, Rāma would plaintively cry, "Tossed by the monsoon wind, you enter my life and tease me by moving like the thready waist of beautiful Seeta!" Addressing the deer, Rāma would say, "I will not covet any tempting object in future. I will never give up dharma. Temporarily deprived of it, I have attracted disgrace, though I was fully aware of good and evil. Along with my life, Seeta has been separated from me. Please tell me where she is now." Then Rāma would wail aloud, "O my life, you have partly deserted me along with flawless Seeta! Instead, you should have completely left me the moment she was separated from me. Fie on you! Did you not realise how intimately you (my life) were connected with her?" Addressing the konrai creeper he said, "Inimical to the tresses of Seeta, you have a grudge against her and me! When were you my friend?" Talking to himself, Rāma would say, "Like the fierce venom of a young serpent with sharp teeth, the jasmine creeper (with tender flowers) harasses me. *It is not the only one that causes me unbearable agony. Even the scarlet insect 'Indra kōpam' harasses me, when I am already tormented by 'Rāvana kōpam' (Rāvana's fury)! Earlier, with the object of harassing me, Mārica, took the guise of a golden deer. Now, Yama has assumed the form of the monsoon-wind to torment me. It is indeed a wonder that all those wanting to harm me are able to transform themselves into different forms and torture me!"* Addressing the big black cloud in the sky, Rāma would say, "You raise a thunderous sound frightening everyone! Unlike the Rākshasās, will you show me some mercy? Will you declare that you will restore Seeta to me? You tease me with the frequent vision of Seeta, an incarnation of Lakshmi, hailing from the land of Videha after leaving her abode of the lotus flower." Finally Rāma would shout at Manmatha, "It is a futile exercise for you to shoot your arrows and hurt me. My life has already been

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burnt by the heat in me due to Seeta's separation. What you now see is a lifeless body. You had better go away. If you are seen by knowledgeable Lakshmana, none can save you from his wrath. Brave one! Bows and arrows are not meant to be used on weaklings! Have you given up compassion? You do not seem to spare me day and night. Does it become you to show your might before humble ones?"

Looking at Rāma who was sad and weak, Lakshmana appealed to him with folded hands and said, "Dear brother, you seem to have no idea of yourself. You are endowed with the knowledge of great books and also the knowledge of the why and how of everything in this world. You have the strength of penance on your side. Why have you lost your confidence? Is it because of the season and the incessant rain, or because you started thinking of the strength of the dark Rākshasās? Or is it because the army that was assembled by Vāli has not arrived? *Even if the Védas go awry, or the moon loses its orbit, or the sky, the ocean and the earth transgress their allotted boundaries, can you afford to lose your natural traits?* Can the might of these senseless Rākshasās (with grotesque teeth) stand before the very movement of your bow-like eyebrows? Though we know the extent of Hanuman's prowess, we do not as yet know the capabilities of Angada and the seventy vellam vānaras who are with him. The agonising rainy months will pass away quickly, and Seeta (possessing your bow-like eyebrows) will certainly join you soon. Please cast away your sorrow. You had once promised to give solace to sages who had taken refuge in you and relieve their sorrow by annihilating all Rākshasās. They have therefore harmed you directly. Instead of losing your head and heart, you should seek name and fame by giving the Devas back their celestial world after destroying these Rākshasās. Can anyone other than you, accomplish this? Giving way to sorrow is certainly not a sign of bravery. *You should not consider time as an obstacle. Time is always required for completing a task.* Cast aside your anxiety. There is nothing that you cannot achieve if you stand up and fight."

The onset of the rainy season, just when Rāma was separated from Seeta, had made his suffering more acute, shattering both his mind and body. The words of comfort uttered by Lakshmana cleared his mind. He became free from sorrow and started moving about normally. Several days passed by. Suddenly one day, as though a new disease had arrived superimposing itself on the previous one, a fresh bout of rain started pouring from the sky even before the ebbing of the previous spell of rain. All big lakes were filled with water. Close waves one over the other could be seen in these lakes. Black koels lost their voice. Tall mountains became cool. All the eight

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directions were completely masked by the clouds. Those who had been separated from their spouses became unhappy. *The monsoon wind blew, swaying the garments covering the waists of women and the swings on which they were swinging, striking their lovers like a sharp arrow piercing a wound caused by fire.* The oceans were filled with water. The rays of the sun lost their heat. It was difficult to distinguish night from day. Parrots, humbled by the lisping words of women resembling peacocks, went inside the paddy heaps and spilled the seeds; and pearls, humbled by the teeth of women, took shelter under the tidal sea. In the abodes of the inhabitants of the maritime tract, golden flowers bloomed from the branches of punnai trees! *Just as the sages who renounce everything in life hold on steadfastly to dharma, elephants stood firmly without sleep near the mountains, unconcerned with the incessant rain that fell on them.* Swans warmed themselves in the smoke of aquila burnt daily in the mornings and evenings around the oblation fire pits in the hermitages. Female monkeys slept inside caves on the laps of strong male monkeys who were motionless (like yōgis who control their senses), to avoid disturbing them. With the downpour of big drops of rain from the clouds, the flawless mountain streams did not shed the fragrance of the tresses of women and there were none to use the swings supported by strong poles.

Female cranes held back their feathers and stayed where they were, like the women who stayed indoors after separation from their husbands. Cloud-like water-birds behaved like trained dancers, amidst bees of many kinds humming music. Clusters of clouds produced thunder which frightened herds of deer. As a result, they went under trees full of peacocks as if they were eager to watch their dance! Women with slim waists, humbling tender stems of flowers, and their men slept together on cots, while the aquila smoke obliterated the light from the lamp! Bees, deserting their lotus-flower beds, opted for crevices in sandalwood trees blooming with flowers and slept there. Swans left their usual lotus abode and stayed inside the woods. Tribal men and women slept on lofts built of sandalwood, so that the water below did not touch them. Shepherds collected their goats and stayed under huge trees seeking protection from the rain. On such a dark rainy night, thoughtful Rāma, haunted by the beautiful black eyes and smile of Seeta, gave out a scorching sigh and told Lakshmana, "Dear Seeta will pine away and perish because of the deceit of Rāvana who resembles the black clouds above, and whose fierce teeth are like the lightning emerging from them. When sharp and deadly arrows which can burn the foes are lying idle in my quiver and my shoulders are huge and powerful, why should I suffer like this? I am in pain as if a

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spear has entered my chest without taking my life! While these flocks of male sparrows sleep in the company of female ones in the light thrown by fireflies, I am here in this forest with a broken heart, struck by the flowery arrows of Manmatha. I am in agony like the cobra suffering from fright whenever lightning strikes with a thunderous sound.

"Those belonging to heaven and the nether world, are bound to laugh at what has happened to me in the forest. What further insults should I bear? Without Seeta, I am certain to die if this rainy season continues to torment me like this. Dear Lakshmana, it may be long before we go from here and find her. It is better that I give up my efforts. I would prefer people to know that I died of love! I had once enjoyed the sweet nectar flowing from the coral mouth of Seeta. The raindrops now burn me as if melted copper is being poured over me. Do I deserve to die in agony like this? *I have falsified the promise of protection given to Janaka, in the presence of the sacred fire fed by ghee, when he handed Seeta over to me. How can truth rest in me hereafter? It is better that I die.* Neither your soothing words, nor the comfort I receive from you, can bring back Seeta. I shall continue to suffer from the pangs of separation. My grief is limitless. I know I will be able to see the peacock-complexioned Seeta only after my arrows burn the world of Brahma, and destroy the Devas and all living beings. Lakshmana! If I have refrained from doing these acts, it is only because of my fear of giving up dharma. Otherwise, I am certain that even if the Rākshasa enemies join the Devas and stand before me, they cannot escape from me alive."

Lakshmana said, "More than half of the four months that had been given to Sugreeva is now over. The time to find the abode of Rāvana has almost arrived. Why then should you worry? *Lord Mahāvishnu could have got the nectar of immortality, the moment he commanded the ocean of milk. Still, the Lord did not show His power. He preferred to use the Mandara mountain and obtain the nectar only after churning the ocean. Though the Lord is powerful enough to create the whole world and then consume it through His mouth, He does not do so. He destroys the wicked, using mighty strategies and deploying several war-weapons including the Disc. Can anyone enumerate the weapons used and the plans conceived by Lord Siva (who can annihilate all objects with His eye) before He burnt Tripura? We must therefore collect all those who will help us, and think deeply of everything that deserves our thought.* If we select the appropriate day, and act with clarity, will victory ever elude us? When the Rākshasās have abandoned dharma and taken to evil ways, fame and success will

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naturally come to us. The time for relieving the sufferings of Seeta has slowly arrived. You must therefore get rid of your sorrow. Can we, who ought to be helpful to the sages, afford to be targets for the Rākshasās? O great archer! Please tell me." Agreeing with Lakshmana, Rāma became quiet. Yet he pined sorrowfully, wondering whether there was an end to the rainy season! The rains, however, gradually stopped. *The dark clouds exhausted all their water and became white, like the philanthropists who, after giving away all they possess, feel ashamed because there is nothing more to give. The end of the rainy season and the onset of spring dispelled darkness, like the knowledge of philosophy dispelling the wrong notion of considering sin as dharma, from the minds of those who 'suffer' from excess wealth. The thundering of the clouds came to an end, like the sound of the war-drums coming to a halt after the end of hostilities. The sharp shower of water from the sky stopped as if there was no longer a shower of deadly arrows. Lightning disappeared like the disappearing of swords into their sheaths after war. Tall and huge mountains were bereft of flood-water at the foot of the hills, even though streams flowed fast on their bodies, as if these mountains had only a white upper-cloth without the lower apparel. Clouds disappeared from the mountains, stopping the inflow of water into all the major rivers, like the depletion of the wealth of one who forsakes dharma and pursues a sinful path. The clouds left the sky, freeing the moon which was earlier screened by them. The moon now looked like the face of a multi-faceted dancer, after the raising of the curtain.* The cool wind from the hills blew hard, carrying with it pollen from fragrant flowers, and dried the paste of sandalwood, musk and saffron, smeared on the breasts of women.

Swans flew in all directions as though they were joyously going in search of Seeta, now that the time stipulated by Rāma for getting rid of his sorrow had arrived. Peacocks, however, became quiet because of the disappearance of the rain, and seemed to share the sad feelings of Seeta. *The water in the tanks became clear like the minds of persons who renounced everything in life and were totally free from sin.* The red lotuses borne by ripe stems, leaned on one side without lustre, like the faces of women feigning a dislike for their husbands. Tall red shrubs, with their fragrant buds, looked like the red lips of women enjoying themselves with their men. *The frogs which were making a loud noise during the rains like several young children studying with enthusiasm from learned teachers, became silent like wise ones who never open their mouths except in places where they are heard with respect.* Pearls looked like the smile of the river (wife) as the sea (husband) happily embraced her along with her robes

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(water) after drawing her close to him with his hands (waves)! The arecanut bunches attained a golden hue, like women attaining a yellow complexion after being separated from their husbands who go abroad in pursuit of knowledge. Crocodiles which had been in cool water for a number of days, came to the banks of the tanks and slept quietly closing their mouths and enjoying the warmth of the sun's rays. All the snails went underground into the mud, as though they were ashamed to look at the women whose teeth were more beautiful than the pearls that they (the snails) gave birth to! Because of the rains, the lotus creepers in the cultivable land had grown well. *Male lobsters living under the shelter of these big lotus leaves, like misers, blocked the passage into the earthern holes soon after they went inside with their mates!*

10. KISHKINDA

After the end of the rainy season, Rāma told Lakshmana, "Look at the behaviour of Sugreeva. Even after the expiry of the four-month period that I had fixed for him, he has not come here. The wealth and the kingdom which he attained would have been difficult without our help. He has forgotten the love shown by us. *He has given up dharma and failed to help us who had helped him.* He does not seem to be aware of even our heroic deeds. Immersed in his royal comforts, he has become intoxicated. Giving up truth, he has destroyed our excellent friendship. I do not think it would be a crime to kill one like him. Please go and find out what is in his mind. Tell him, 'We have with us, Yama, who cannot be stopped by anyone and also the bow which can establish dharma in this world by slaying the wicked'. I do not think that punishing venomous ones is wrong. Even Manu justifies it. *You had better convey this to Sugreeva who is incapable of understanding things, be he five years old or fifty!* Tell him that if he and his kin wish to continue to rule their kingdom, they must, as they promised, come immediately to search for Seeta. If they fail to do so, we will destroy all the vānaras and wipe out their very name. Let Sugreeva, Angada and the others be told of this. If they are after the friendship of someone 'stronger' than us, let them understand that there is no one in all the three worlds who can defeat you. If even after explaining to Sugreeva and the others what is just and proper, you are not able to make them change their minds, do not kill them out of anger. Come back to me with their answer."

After falling at the feet of Rāma, Lakshmana tied on a quiver of arrows, took his excellent bow in his hand and instantly left the place to carry out the wishes of his brother. Avoiding the route by which Sugreeva had taken him earlier, Lakshmana

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took a different route, pulverising the trees and mountains that stood in his way. Lakshmana's strong feet pressed the mountainous terrain so hard that the tall trees on the mountains went deep inside. *The speed with which Rāma's younger brother, Lakshmana, went in search of Vāli's younger brother, Sugreeva, was like the speed with which Rāma's arrow penetrated the seven tall Marāmarams.* Lakshmana looked like the regional elephant speedily following the footprints of its offspring that had lost its way. With the velocity of Rāma's unimpeded arrow, Lakshmana reached the tall Kishkinda mountain and appeared like a lion with a golden mane and neck. The vānaras who saw the furious Lakshmana were frightened as if they had seen Yama. They assembled together and told Angada, "Lakshmana has come here with great speed and anger." Angada went up to Lakshmana to find out why he had come, and understood from his very face what was passing in his mind. Angada then went to Sugreeva.

The palace in which Sugreeva was lying on a pleasant bed, covered with flowers full of petals, was built by a vānara known as Nalan. In the midst of women with flowing hair and tender breasts, Sugreeva was asleep, lying like a big silver mountain inside a golden mountain, totally intoxicated with the riches derived from the kingdom that was given to him by Rāma and Lakshmana. Sugreeva was in slumber enjoying the breeze which carried the fragrance of the exquisite flowers tucked in the flowing hair of the women surrounding him. Lying flat like a rutted elephant, he was intoxicated with lust and forgetfulness as he was surrounded by lovely vānara women whose red lips were like the kovvai fruit and whose teeth were like pearls. The jewels and the ear-rings he wore shone on his white body like the sun's rays on the Himālayan mountain covered with snow. This was the state of Sugreeva when Angada came to him with folded hands and tried to wake him up with the words, "My dear father, please listen to me. Lakshmana, the brother of Rāma, has come here with such speed and anger that no one can face him. What are you going to do?" *The intoxication of power and the consumption of fragrant liquor had made Sugreeva utterly senseless.* Not a word of what Angada said was heard or understood by him. Angada realised that there was nothing he could do by himself and went to Hanuman.

Accompanied by Hanuman and other vānara chiefs, Angada went to the palace of his mother Tāra, explained to her all that had happened, and asked her, "What should we do now?" Tara replied, "After doing all that ought not to have been done, you are all attempting to find out a way to avoid the consequences. Do you think there is any

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escape for ungrateful ones like you? The time given to you by Rāma, to collect an army and reach him, is over. I have repeatedly told you that with this lapse, your time in this world will also lapse! *You will now reap the consequence of not listening to my advice. How dare you insult Rāma who placed the bright treasure of a kingdom in your hands after taking away, with his arrow, the dear life of Vāli.* Those who have treated Rāma with scant respect after receiving his help, deserve what is in store for them. When Rāma is going through the pain of separation from his Seeta, how could you all enjoy yourselves with your lovely wives? *You have all given up truth. You have forgotten the good done to you by Rāma. You have lost your character because of your sins.* If you try to fight Rāma and Lakshmana, you will all be killed. Now what is there for you to do?" The monkeys who were strong and invincible, assembled at the entrance to Kishkinda and bolted the tall gates (made of iron bars) from within. They blocked the entrance with huge boulders placed one over the other. They also heaped uprooted trees and stood near the wall of the fort, wanting to attack Lakshmana in case he broke open the gate and came in. Lakhsmana saw the gates shut. He wondered, "Is it the intention of these monkeys to guard themselves from me?" He smiled scornfully and pushed the gate with his lotus foot. Instantly the huge boulders and the connecting wall crumbled (like harsh sins) and flew for a distance of ten yojanas in all directions. The monkeys who had planned to fight with Lakshmana saw this and became frightened. They ran far away. The great commotion raised by them as they sped in all directions, made Kishkinda look like the ocean of milk being churned by the Mandara mountain. A number of monkeys ran away into the forest, deserting the city of Kishkinda. Lakshmana then entered the beautiful streets of the city. Seeing him, Angada and others exclaimed to Tāra, "Lakshmana has come! What shall we do?"

Hanuman told Tāra, "O great lady! You alone can stand at the entrance to Sugreeva's palace and prevent righteous Lakshmana from entering it. He will then frankly tell you the purpose of his visit." Tāra asked everyone to clear out of the place. She said she would go to Lakshmana and find out what had brought him there. Tāra marched with many vānara women bedecked with fragrant flowers and stood before Lakshmana as he was about to enter Sugreeva's palace after crossing the royal pathways where the vānara leaders lived. Lakshmana's progress into the palace was impeded by the delicate and beautiful Tāra accompanied by vānara women with white bangles and white teeth. These women possessed lightning-like slender waists, well-formed bosoms and a peacock-like complexion. A band of vānara women whose weapons were the exquisite ornaments they wore, whose war-drums were the jingling

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sound of their anklets and bracelets, whose flags were their arched eyebrows, and whose spears were their eyes, surrounded Lakshmana the possessor of mountain-like shoulders.

Lakshmana looked majestic and ferocious with a bow in his hand and a sword at his waist. His anger slowly abated in the presence of these women. He turned his face away from them. He was afraid even to look at them. He propped his bow on the ground, bent his head, and stood before them like a shy new son-in-law before a crowd of mothers-in-law. Tāra, with her beautiful shoulders, long eyes, and pure heart, stood aloof from the crowd of vānara women and nervously addressed Lakshmana, "O valiant one! Without worrying about the discomfort and pain caused to your sacred feet, you have come here. This is an honour for us, which even Devendra and others would not have merited. We have probably been blessed with a visit by you because of our limitless penance. The imprint of your sacred feet on our floor has brought us good fortune. Is there anything better that can happen to us than your coming here and wiping out all our sins? But the angry mood in which you have come has frightened all the vānaras who are duty-bound to help you. Please let us know why you have come here, leaving Rāma's sacred feet from which you have never been separated." Listening to Tāra whose words were sweeter than music, Lakshmana raised his head slightly to see who could have spoken thus. *He then saw a feminine face which was like a full moon that had come down to the earth during the day. The moment Lakshmana's eyes fell on her, he thought of his mother and felt sad. The sight of Tāra who had completely covered her neck and bosom with an upper cloth, without any jewels, without the sacred māngalyam, and without flowers, brought forth copious tears from Lakshmana who was grief-stricken. He stood speechless for a long time, with a depressed mind, wondering whether his two widowed mothers, Kausalya and Sumitra, would not be in the same apparel as this Tāra standing before him.* Realising it would be improper to stand like this for long without uttering a word, Lakshmana looked at Tāra and said, "Sugreeva has forgotten his promise to Rāma that he would come with his army to find Seeta's whereabouts. Rāma sent me here to know Sugreeva's mind. Please tell me why Sugreeva, on whom this kingdom was conferred, is behaving thus."

Tāra replied,"O lord, please do not be angry. If small beings like us commit mistakes, big ones like you must show patience and not anger. Who except you can exhibit such nobility? I wish to assure you that Sugreeva has not forgotten his promise. He has sent messengers in all directions to mobilise the vānara army and is awaiting

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their return. Can anything that Sugreeva does in return be equal to the help Rāma and you have rendered him? Very shortly, crores of monkeys will be arriving here at the behest of Sugreeva. It is up to you and Rāma (possessing greater love than a mother towards those who have completely surrendered themselves to you) to be rid of your anger! How can anyone be punished for a fault not committed? If those who had sought your protection gave up their duty towards you, steeped in arrogance owing to the wealth granted by you, even that becomes your responsibility. Will it be a lasting friendship if we friends do not give up our lives in the fierce battle which is to take place for Seeta's sake? Rāma and you destroyed the enemies of Sugreeva and gave the kingdom to him, enabling him to be happy. If he were to forget these very persons who helped him, he is certain to lose not only his glory but also his wealth in this very birth. It was a single arrow of Rāma that killed Vāli. Do you then need the help of anyone else? What greater assistance do you require than the mighty bows in your hands? All that you need now is someone who can find out where Seeta is. Sugreeva and others who have sought refuge at your sacred feet are most certainly duty-bound to do this."

The knowledgeable Lakshmana felt ashamed. He stood silently after listening to Tāra's words. Hanuman immediately came close to him knowing that his anger had abated, and prostrated himself at his feet. Lakshmana, who was full of compassion even while angry, looked at Hanuman and said, "How is it that even you, endowed with deep knowledge, forgot all that had happened earlier?" *Hanuman, a master of his tongue, replied, "O lord, please listen to my words. Even if one commits the sin of killing one's beloved mother and father, or sages and cows, or women and children, one can hope to get redemption in some way or other. But there is no redemption for one who has committed the grievous sin of forgetting the help received.* Was it not my effort that brought about genuine friendship between you and our vānara king (Sugreeva) some time ago? If this friendship gets dissolved now, there is no one who can escape from the consequences, and the blame will fall upon us. *I feel that the penance we have done in our previous births as well as in this one, all the righteous things that we have done so far and our very God are only Rāma and you.* To whom can we turn if you, the protector of all the three worlds, are angry with us? Our only refuge is your compassion. Sugreeva, the vānara king, has not forgotten your orders. He has sent messengers in several groups to all the places asking the vānaras to assemble here. Having joined you, a close follower of dharma, if Sugreeva is to seek a different path, he might as well not have been born and is bound to go to hell. Is there any act by

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which we can repay one who has helped us without having received any help from us? When such a friend faces enemies, if we neither shoot our weapons on them, nor lay down our lives, what is the use of our friendship? If we are to stand here as though we differ from you, our enemies will exploit the situation and destroy our friendship. Please come inside and see the wealth you have given us, and meet the vānara king, Sugreeva, who is like your elder brother."

Hanuman's words softened Lakshmana. He thought, "This Sugreeva has after all not forgotten Rāma's orders. The only thing that seems to have happened is that he is totally immersed in the pleasures of the wealth he obtained. As a result, he has shrunk in character." Lakshmana looked at Hanuman and said, "There is something which I want to tell you which deserves your attention. The anger and the loss of self-respect caused by the abduction of Seeta, have made Rāma's life miserable. Casting away royal virtues, I would have committed the sin of harshly punishing the wicked without bothering about the consequent blemish. However, I controlled my anger. After coming to life, it took me several days to pacify my lord, Rāma! If our anger had remained unabated, all the three worlds and dharma itself would have been destroyed and there would have been none left to remove the sinful effects of our anger. Because Rāma saw you first, he believed that your king, Sugreeva, would come to his help in the form of a brother like me. Rāma is still preserving his life with this fond hope. Is it a big task for Rāma's bow to bring back Seeta even if she is hidden somewhere in the fourteen worlds? The inordinate delay in keeping your word is definitely against dharma. As a result of your failure, the Rākshasās who have been roaming about and killing people are still alive. You have brought grief to the Devas, caused misery to the sages who wanted to perform yāgas, and encouraged the growth of sins. Finally, you and Sugreeva have made even great Rāma who is always calm, lose his temper." Hanuman bowed to pleasant Lakshmana and said, "Please do not take to heart what has happened. We will forfeit our lives, if we do not fulfil our promise. Let dharma be our witness. Please meet your brother, Sugreeva." Lakshmana replied, "Earlier, did we not do as you suggested? Henceforth, too, we will act accordingly." Lakshmana then proceeded with Hanuman to meet Sugreeva and know his mind. *Just then Tāra returned with her group of beautiful vānara women who walked like swans, possessing eyes like véls, teeth like pearls, tender shoulders like bamboos, voices like the cuckoo's, breasts like golden urns, waists like lightning, noses like the kumizh flower and tresses like the black clouds. Angada and the knowledgeable vānara ministers prostrated themselves at*

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the lotus feet of Lakshmana, now that he had ceased to be angry. Lakshmana asked Angada to inform Sugreeva of his arrival. Angada accordingly went into the palace and held the golden feet of Sugreeva. Rubbing them and waking him up, Angada told him, "Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rāma, is standing outside the palace entrance. His fit of anger is mightier than the ocean. This is all that I can tell you."

Sugreeva, who knew nothing of what had happened earlier, woke up from his stupor and said, "We have not done anything wrong. Why is Lakshmana angry with us?" Angada replied, "Father! You did not go to Rāma with your army on the stipulated day. Indulging in your pleasures, you forgot the help rendered to you by Rāma. Your unfaithful behaviour has made Lakshmana furious. *If he has spared our lives, it is only because of Hanuman's soothing words.* Our vānara heroes blocked the huge entrance to our city with boulders, to prevent valiant Lakshmana from entering. Even before his foot touched them, the boulders and the walls crumbled and flew out in different directions. How can I describe the fright this gave the vānaras? *Finally, my mother, Tāra, along with a few vānara women stopped Lakshmana.* Without even looking at them, furious Lakshmana stood in silence. Tāra assuaged his anger with sweet words and assured him that you have not forgotten Rāma's orders, and that you have sent messengers through the mountainous pathways to bring fierce vānara armies from different places and that you are awaiting the arrival of those armies." Sugreeva asked Angada, "If Rāma and Lakshmana were to be angry, is there anyone either in this world or the celestial world to face them? Why did you not inform me as soon as Lakshmana came here?" Angada replied, "Dear father, I did tell you but you failed to respond because you were not in your senses. As I was unable to do anything, I went to Hanuman. Now, you must meet Lakshmana immediately." Sugreeva realised his lapse and said, "Brave Angada! Could anyone else have received the great help and the untold wealth I received from Rāma? I forgot all about Rāma's difficulties which he was hoping to get rid of with my help. All this happened because I was intoxicated. I am now ashamed to meet Lakshmana. What can be worse than losing one's senses through drinks? *When the habit of drinking can make one lose the capacity to distinguish one's mother from one's wife, what is the use of one possessing any good qualities? Consuming liquor itself is one of the five major sins*. I am guilty of another sin. I failed to do my*

* *Committing murder, stealing, uttering a lie, consuming liquor and talking ill of one's preceptor are the five major sins (Panca mahā pātakam).*

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duty after losing my senses! Instead of getting rid of my congenital faults by seeking enlightment, I have sought happiness by consuming liquor. This is like trying to put out fire with ghee! The Védas and all other texts on religion assert that the moment one realises the self, the inglorious chain of birth and death will cease. *The result of non-attainment of true wisdom is the acquisition of this dirty mortal body replete with ailments. Should I make things worse by consuming intoxicating drinks?*

"Only those who protect the ones who surrender, and those who successfully control the five senses and master philosophy (treating sorrow and joy with equanimity), will have a proper end. Has anyone ever seen a happy end for those who seek pleasures through liquor? Full of deceit and ignorance, such persons only end up in grief after acquiring the bad habit of letting down persons who seek their help. *Even Lakshmi will desert them! Is there anything that can do greater good than learning about the harm done by enemies and the help rendered by friends, or accepting the advice given by those who have mastered the scriptures? Consuming poison will kill only the body, whereas consuming liquor will not only kill the body but will also throw one's soul into hell.* All these days, we have only heard the elders talk about the evil effects of liquor. But now their words have been proved right! I have no doubt that we have escaped death at Lakshmana's hands only because of Hanuman's wisdom. O lord! I am afraid to think of the bad effects of liquor. I have now decided that it is undesirable to touch liquor and even to think of it." *After uttering these words, Sugreeva took an oath, "Let Rāma's sacred feet destroy me if I consume liquor even after I have seen with my own eyes the damage it has done."*

Sugreeva prepared himself for receiving Lakshmana, and sent Angada in advance to bring him. Together with his wives and relatives, he waited at the entrance to his palace. The streets of Kishkinda were flooded with sandalwood paste, flowers, scented powders, fragrant smoke, rows of golden pots, lamps and incomparable pearl necklaces to welcome Lakshmana. The crystal walls and the tall pillars with the sparkling nine gems, all reflected images of Lakshmana with the bow in his hand and made it appear as though a thousand Lakshmanas had arrived at Kishkinda. When Angada again paid obeisance to Lakshmana, the latter asked, "Where is Sugreeva?" Angada replied, "Sugreeva is standing at the entrance to the palace to receive you." With his royal white umbrella shining like the full moon, Sugreeva, accompanied by a number of vānara women who carried with them fragrant powder and flowers,

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stood before heroic Lakshmana holding a mighty bow. He was welcomed with the beating of drums, the recitation of the Védas and the spread of music in all directions. In the midst of women looking like stars, Sugreeva stood like the bright moon, resembling his father Soorya with his shining rays. Though Lakshmana was angry the moment he saw Sugreeva, he calmed down thinking of dharma! After embracing each other with their huge arms (mightier than iron pillars), both of them entered the golden palace. Sugreeva requested Lakshmana to sit on the throne which had been kept ready for him. *Lakshmana thought, "Do I deserve to be seated on this throne while my beloved Rāma, the Lord of Mahālakshmi, is resting on a grassy bed?" He then told Sugreeva, "I cannot be seated comfortably on this golden throne, when my lord, Rāma, has discarded the kingdom and come to the forest." Hearing these words, Sugreeva stood speechless shedding tears.*

Lakshmana sat on the floor in that huge palace. The sight made all the vānaras, young and old, male and female, very sad. Sugreeva told Lakshmana, "Only if you have some food and feel satiated, will we be happy." Lakshmana replied, "When sorrow and shame have filled our stomachs, even nectar will taste bitter to us. If you search for Seeta and find her, you will be successfully putting out the fire of our blemish. It would be as if we had taken a dip in River Ganga. Only then will we be free from grief and feel as if we have tasted nectar. *I only eat what is left from the leaves, tubers and greens, eaten by Rāma. If I desire to eat anything else, it would amount to my eating what is left by a dog." Suddenly remembering Rāma's plight, Lakshmana said, "Dear Sugreeva, I cannot stay here for a moment longer because Rāma does not eat anything except the greens and other things which I collect from the forest and give him. I have to go at once."* Sugreeva felt he had no right to spend his time happily when Rāma was steeped in sorrow. With tears in his eyes, he rose and told Hanuman, "You know dharma! You shall bring with you the vānara army that will assemble shortly. Till then be here." Sugreeva then left with Lakshmana. Preceded by the vānara heroes and accompanied by Angada, he marched speedily towards Rāma, leaving behind the hearts of vānara women and the path traversed by him.

Soon vānara armies started pouring in from all sides. Crores of them assembled. When Sugreeva finally appeared before Rāma, there were clusters of flags everywhere. The sound of war-drums and conches rent the sky. Dust rose from the earth screening the sky completely. Palanquins made of silver, pearls, fine cloth and shining gems

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moved close to one another. Tall white royal umbrellas attracted the attention of everyone. As barefooted Lakshmana walked on the ground, Sugreeva, too, walked with his empty palanquin following him. *Lakshmana and Sugreeva, closely followed by Angada, reached Rāma, while their anxiety and eagerness to see him went in advance!* The vānara army halted at a distance. Falling at the sacred feet of Rāma, Sugreeva looked like Bharata who daily made obeisance to Rāma the incarnation of virtue. Without Lakshmana by his side, Rāma resembled the solitary Lord Tirumāl! Prostrating himself before this Lord, Sugreeva allowed his pearl necklace to touch the ground. Rāma was relieved of his anger. 'Hurting' Lakshmi resting in his bosom, he embraced Sugreeva warmly with his long arms. Showing his love as before, Rāma asked Sugreeva to be seated and enquired, *"Is your writ running smoothly in your kingdom without any hindrance? Possessing the disposition of charitable clouds, how are you protecting the innumerable lives? Are your subjects doing well? Is your royal umbrella giving cool shade?"* Sugreeva replied, "You who will not perish even during pralaya! How can I suffer from hardship when I have obtained the benevolence of one like you who can (like the sun) dispel darkness from the world? You are endowed with noble qualities. I am, however, ashamed that even though I attained my wealth through your compassion, I have shown my monkey's mind and transgressed your command. Though capable of searching for Seeta in all the eight directions, I wasted my time in the pleasures of life when you were pining away in sorrow. What should I do hereafter? Please command me." Rāma replied, "The rainy season which seemed very long, has come and gone. Can your rightful words of assurance be ignored? Should you, whose affection for me is like that of Bharata's, talk to me like this?" After pacifying Sugreeva, Rāma asked him, "Where is Hanuman who knows everything?" Sugreeva told Rāma, "Hanuman will arrive with a vast army. One thousand crores of messengers have gone to bring the huge vānara army for which Hanuman is waiting. He will come here either today or tomorrow as the time given by you for collecting the army has also arrived. Nine thousand crores of vānaras have already come with me. Let us plan our strategy after the arrival of the rest of the army." Rāma told Sugreeva, "You are modest. I know that mustering an army is not difficult for you." Asking Sugreeva to meet him the next day with the army, Rāma told Angada, "Be with Sugreeva, your father." *After sending the two away, Rāma (with Seeta in his mind) settled down for the night in the company of his brother, Lakshmana.*

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11. VIEWING THE VĀNARA ARMY

The golden sun rose from behind the eastern hills. The vānara army brought by powerful messengers, started to assemble even before dawn. Satavali, a vānara hero who had the strength of innumerable elephants, arrived with crores of vānaras. Sushedanan, another vānara hero, brought with him crores of vānaras who could break and lift any mountain. The father of Urumai (Sugreeva's wife) collected an army which seemed like a shoreless sea. Kesari, who had brought Hanuman into this world, arrived with a huge force of vānaras whose shoulders were like the mighty Meru. *Frightful Dhoomiran, a vānara hero with a gigantic body resembling Mahāvishnu's incarnation of the Varāha (Boar), brought with him a huge army of bears and appeared before Sugreeva.* Gavātshan and Panasan arrived with their respective armies of vānaras. Neelan came with a mighty battalion of vānaras shouting loudly, drowning the sound of thunder and the roar of the waves. Fiery Dhareemukhan whose face resembled a cave, brought with him countless vānaras each one of whom looked bigger than a mountain. Kayan, another vānara hero, was seen with a huge army of vānaras who could frighten even a pride of angry lions. Jāmbavan, the great king of bears, with a ferocious face, was seen approaching with countless vānaras like the unending waves of the ocean. Dhunmukhan who had been blessed by Lord Brahma for decimating the Rākshasās, came with another huge army of ferocious vānaras. Raising columns of dust that covered the sky, mountain-like Tumindan arrived with crores of vānaras. *Moving faster than wind, Kumudan with his vānara army appeared like the very sea with all its waves.* The army brought by indestructible Padumukhan raised a great deal of dust that went up into the sky. Idaban, Deergapātan, Vinatan, Saraban, Kumbhan, Sangan and several other vānara heroes arrived with their respective armies, each one of which was colossal. *The numerical strength of these armies could be compared only with the number of arrows in the quiver of Rāma. Hanuman (who never feared even Soorya) brought a huge vānara army, which dwarfed the eight directions of the world!*

The vānaras brought by the various leaders were so numerous that if all of them entered the seven seas, they would all go dry. If all the vānaras who had assembled went to one side, the world and the Meru would tilt and lose their balance. If all these vānaras came out and occupied every bit of available space, there would be no space left even for a small gingili seed. If all these vānaras became angry simultaneously, the very sun would be burnt. Brahma's seventy thousand Devas would be inadequate

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to enumerate all the vānaras that had assembled there that day. Lord Siva even with His third eye would be unable to visualise all of them. *The collective strength of the vānara army was such that if they desired to destroy, the northern Meru would be demolished to its very root; if they wanted to thunder, the very roof of the sky would be shattered; if they decided to use their hands, Lord Yama and the wind would be caught by them; if they desired to drink the water contained in the seven seas, it would be siphoned off from the palms of their hands!* The countless vānara leaders could jump beyond the four directions, north, south, east and west. They had such strength of mind that they could put into action whatever King Sugreeva desired. *The vānara leaders brought more and more vānara armies and came to their leader, Sugreeva, prostrated themselves at his feet, offered him flowers and wished him a long life.*

Sugreeva, the son of Soorya, sped to Rāma, the son of Dasaratha and told him, "Our huge army has assembled faster than I thought. Please come and see it for yourself." Rāma was happy, and his face reflected his joy. He climbed to the top of a nearby mountain to see the vānara army. Sugreeva in the mean time went back to the army of vānaras and asked them to spread out for a distance of fifteen yojanas from north to south. He collected only the army chiefs, and went to Rāma again and introduced each one of them to him. The army which was made to march past Rāma, roared like the ocean of milk. The vānara army which had occupied all the eight directions, raised so much dust that it covered the entire sky. The whole world appeared like a pot filled with dust! The army could not be compared even to the sea, because neither the army's beginning nor its end was visible unlike the boundaries of the sea seen by a few. When Rāma and Lakshmana could not find even the middle of the moving army after watching it for nearly twenty days, how could they see the end of it? Rāma finally looked at Lakshmana and said, "With perseverence, we have managed to see almost the middle of the vānara army. I do not think there is any way by which we can see the end of this army. *Just as there is no one who can discern fully the form of the Lord, the ten directions, the five elements and the subtle differences between various religions, there is no one who can properly see and get a full measure of this army.* If we are to see the whole army from here and then start our work, a number of days will elapse. It is better to plan and act immediately." *Lakshmana replied, "Any work to be done in any world can be accomplished by this army which can easily find Seeta. Thanks to this army, sin will be vanquished and dharma will triumph. Dear brother! Let us send these capable forces in all the eight directions of the world to find Seeta, instead of wasting any more time."*

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12. THE SEARCH

Rāma asked Sugreeva whether it was possible to know the size of his vānara army. Sugreeva replied, "Knowledgeable ones say that it has a strength of seventy vellams. There are sixty-seven crores of leaders for the army. The first among them is Neelan who can burn to ashes even the fierce Yama." Rāma then told Sugreeva that there was no point in wasting their time talking. He wanted Sugreeva to act without further delay. Sugreeva turned to Hanuman and said, "You do not seem to be aware of the speed with which you can go round the three worlds, like Vāyu, your father. Your inaction is probably because you want to watch the actions of other vānaras. Proceed from here and find Seeta, be she in this or the nether world. Your talent to move speedily in the celestial world also must now come to the fore. My mind tells me that the big city of Rāvana is in the southern direction. I feel that Seeta has been taken there by that cruel Rākshasa. Who else except you can defeat the Rākshasās there and earn immortal fame? Let Angada and Jāmbavan accompany you with a force of two vellams of sturdy vānaras." Sugreeva then deputed Idaban to go to the west, Satavali to the north, and Vinatan to the east, accompanied by a vānara army of two vellams each. He told them, "I expect you vānaras who deserve to be decorated with garlands of victory, to return within a month, after searching for Seeta in all places."

Looking at the vānaras who were bound southwards, Sugreeva said, "All of you visit the great *Vindhya* mountain which will appear like Lord Tirumāl, because of its thousand lovely shining peaks. Make your obeisance to this great mountain and search for Seeta there. After that you will reach the beautiful river, *Narmada*, which is fit for the Devas to bathe in. You will find this river sparkling with the light of several gems, dispelling darkness. From there, proceed to a mountain known as *Hemakoota* where bejewelled celestial women dance and sing putting to sleep the music-loving birds known as asunam. Get out of this mountain quickly after searching for Seeta on the shores of the lakes and reach the bank of *River Pennai*. After making your search here, slowly cross the *Vidarbha* kingdom which has a large number of sandalwood and aquila trees as its boundary, and then reach *Dandakāranyam*. There is a place inside this *Dandakāranyam* known as *Mundakaturai*, a garden once occupied by Sage Agastya. All those who see this garden, the seat of sages doing penance, will be rid of their sorrow. *Mundakaturai, replete with flowers, is a perennial garden like the everlasting riches of good people*. You will find the place full of sweet fruits, always ripe like the lips of young damsels of character. The garden's thick foliage is not penetrated by the rays of the sun. People living here, neither close their

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eyelids nor sleep. As you move from this place, you will come across a mountain known as *Pāndugiri*, the peak of which will appear to touch the moon and the sun. Very near this mountain is the sacred river known as *Gōdāvari* which has a constant flow of water. You can see the river carrying pearls and several other gems, moving rapidly, uprooting trees, black stones and even animals.

Next, you will reach the *Suvanam River*, the seat of Lord Muruga. Cross this river and proceed to the mountains known as *Sooryakuntam* and *Candrakuntam* and search for Seeta in both these places. After crossing several regions, you will reach the *Konkan* region and *Kulinda* land where the serpent, Ādisesha, had taken refuge from Garuda. Thereafter, you will reach the tall, sacred *Arundati* hill. *Those who cannot realise the infallibility of Lord Siva and Mahāvishnu, will find it difficult to reach heaven; similarly, ordinary persons will find it hard to reach the Arundati hill.* Worship this hill as well as the next, known as *Maragata*. You will then reach the sacred *Tiruvenkata* mountain. This is akin to the final abode for all the Sāstras and the Védas which have the *northern and southern languages (Sanskrit and Tamil) as their boundaries*. This incomparable mountain, a repository of all things that are exemplary and righteous, is occupied by great sages who deserve to be worshipped even from here because of their divine knowledge of philosophy and their impeccable character acquired by detaching themselves from the sinful materialistic life. If, after searching the peaks of this mountain, you stay on, all of you will attain moksha. Therefore do not be tempted to stay there. Continue your search for Seeta and proceed to *Tondai Nādu* full of water. If you do not find her there, then search for her in the great place known as *Ponni* and the two banks of the cool and sacred *Kāveri*. After crossing *Chola Nādu* which has plenty of water as clear as the minds of those who deserve to go to heaven, you will find people who have *conquered sorrow*, residing in a place near by. Do realise the futility of dreaming and sleeping. Keep on searching for Seeta in the adjacent mountainous region full of gems. Later, go to the *Pāndya land of the fine Tamil Nādu* and go south, where you will find the *Podiya mountain* which is the seat of the Tamil Sangham and the abode of Sage Agastya. Therefore, bow to this mountain and go to the *Tāmaraparani* which is full of water made of golden drops. You will then come across the *Mahendra* mountain from where you can see the southern sea. Go beyond even this and search for Seeta in all the places, and report to me within a month."

Rāma looked at Hanuman with compassion and said, "If you are to find Seeta, you will have to know some features by which you can identify her." Taking Hanuman

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aside, Rāma said, *"Seeta's beautiful toes have the divinity of objects arising from the ocean of milk, and appear like little coral pieces smeared with a paste of red flowers. It is only because they are so well assembled, that even lotus flowers are considered no match for her feet.* I wonder what object is there to compare her feet with? O Hanuman, do understand from your clear mind that even if the upper side of her feet are compared with a tortoise by scholars, that would be inadequate. No object can stand comparison with the soft ankles of Seeta, the embodiment of innocence. Poets normally compare women's hind-legs with pregnant varāl fish or a quiver! What joy will I get in repeating these similes? *Seeta's words are sweeter than the music emanating from the yāzh, or the sweet juice from sugar-cane grown in fields fed with plenty of water.* It can be said that her beautiful thighs excel even the plantain trunk. There is no simile with which I can describe Seeta's waist. It is so slender that one cannot see it. Only I know her waist by the touch of my hand. Generally speaking, a woman's belly is compared to a banyan leaf, a silver plate or a circular mirror. The natural beauty of Seeta's belly is such that none of these objects bear any comparison with it. O possessor of knowledge vaster than the ocean! Comparing her navel with the hollow of the big flowers of nandyāvartam, or any other flower, would be an understatement. It can only be compared with a whirlpool in the River Ganga. I gained this impression while I saw its flowing water. On the beautiful belly of Seeta (resembling Lakshmi who left the red lotus flower for fear its petals might harass her), are three golden-coloured folds appearing like creepers! They look like the lines drawn by Manmatha to indicate his success in establishing the truth that all the women belonging to the three worlds are no match for Seeta. Even though I may say that Seeta's breasts can be compared to gem-set caskets, or golden urns, or elephants tusks or tender coconuts, I am not satisfied. I am still in quest of a proper simile! *Whenever I see the sugar-cane or the bamboo, I think of Seeta's arms and shed torrential tears as I do not have a heart of steel to compare these tender arms with them!*

"There is nothing in all the three worlds that can compare with Seeta's beautiful palms. While they are softer than the petals of kāndal (gloriosa superba), they cannot be compared with the makarayāzh either, because they are dissimilar! Can any object of superlative beauty be surpassed by another? How can the tender sprouts appearing on the branches of the asoka tree, or the fine shoots of the beautiful karpaga, or the soft flowers blooming from the lotus creepers, be compared to Seeta's hands when they are no match even to her graceful legs adorned with melodious anklets? Can we, with clarity, offer a simile to the sharp nails of Seeta, the possessor of white teeth, crimson lips and shining ornaments? O great Hanuman! On seeing her

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hands and feet, one would think of the red lotus. Similarly, looking at Seeta's neck one would be reminded of the stem of the areca-nut tree and the conch, though holding them out as objects of comparison would be wrong. Though Seeta's beautiful mouth can be compared with coral and red flowers, none of these similes can do justice to it. Her exquisite mouth can only be compared with itself. *There is no red nectar, nor is there any red honey, like Seeta's lips. Even if there are, they can give pleasure only when consumed, and not at the very thought of them as in the case of her lips.* Will it be proper to compare her coral lips with any object that comes to a joyous mind? We may think of comparing her voice with nectar, milk and honey, in case we compare her teeth with the buds of jasmine, the base of the peacock feathers or pearls. But in reality these are all no match for them just as there can be no equivalent to nectar. If you are an expert, you will realise the absence of a suitable simile for her teeth! It is inadequate to say that Seeta's nose resembles the kumizh flower. This flower does not shine like gold or a bright gem, as her nose (which defies the capabilities of a painter) does! If a juvenile comparison of the scissors is made by an expert to describe Seeta's beautiful ears, such an attempt can only be termed as madness. Only because of the great penance done earlier by her white ear-rings, have they now been transformed into her ears! Can there be a suitable comparison for all objects in this world? Seeta's sword-like eyes can be seen like the dark Tirumāl surrounded by the ocean of milk! You may look at them a thousand times. Still these large eyes defy comparison even to a vast ocean! No object in this world can be compared with the eyebrows protecting Seeta's sharp darting eyes. We can at best compare one of her eyebrows with the other, as Manmatha does not have two lovely bows one by the side of the other! I have closely watched the beauty of her forehead for several days, but I am yet to find a suitable comparison. *If the full moon with all its sixteen phases shedding bright light were to remain without any change, then it could bear a feeble comparison with the forehead of Seeta!*

"After we came to the forest, there was no one to help Seeta with the dressing of her hair. Even then her hair was so flawlessly beautiful and novel that there was nothing in the world that could be compared with its beauty. Seeta's soft and fragrant hair is like sliced dark clouds fed with honey and akhil paste and soaked in darkness. Lord Brahma seems to have created her face as a lunar kingdom containing tender twigs, red lilies, bent bows, excellent kendai fish and shining pearls. *You will notice this when you watch Seeta's lotus face. The divine lotus flower suffers from the handicap of having an unwanted petal or two. The beautiful moon has a black spot. Why, for that matter, any exquisite thing in this world has some fault in it; but the*

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swan-like Seeta is perfect and has absolutely no blemish in her. If we take a close look, we will find that the lovely bodily features of women as detailed in literature are not fully seen even in Goddess Lakshmi. Seeta with her black eyes, red mouth, divine breasts and the voice of a cuckoo — all features which deserve to be worshipped even by the Devas — is not deficient in any feature. *This is how you can find her.* Lord Brahma created the flute, the yāzh, the parrot, the beautiful musical lisp of a child, a number of sweet musical sounds, and finally created the sweet words of the beautiful slender-waisted Seeta. I wonder whether, hereafter, Lord Brahma can create any more faultless sweet sound which can be compared to the words that come from Seeta. If I attempt to give any simile to them, I can only think of milk and honey; but still, these two can give sweetness only to the tongue and not to the ears. The same is the fate of nectar, too! Seeta's complexion is so exquisite that even lightning or the colour of gold, would appear darker, and the colour of the lotus would pale into insignificance. Her complexion cannot be compared with anything conceived so far. All that I can say is that Seeta's complexion can be compared only with itself.

"Noble Hanuman! After you have confirmed in your mind that it is the incomparable Seeta whom you have approached, tell her a few things which I propose to tell you, so that she will know you have been sent by me. Tell her that when I had gone with Sage Viswāmitra to King Janaka's yāga, I saw her standing in the maidens' apartment near the swan lake. Seeta (whose chastity is greater than the vast ocean) later said that she would kill herself, if the person who had broken Siva's bow was not the one she had seen walking with Sage Viswāmitra. Please tell her how I saw her in the royal assembly of Janaka, like a streak of lightning bending backwards, unable to bear the weight of her heavy breasts. Also, remind her how I dissuaded her from coming to the forest with the words, 'Do you foolishly want to follow me to the wild forest which I have not traversed so far? All these days you had made my life sweet and happy. Have you decided to give me trouble hereafter?' *Again, please do mention to Seeta, her reply, when she said in anguish, 'While you are prepared to give up your kingdom and go to the forest, do you think everything else other than your wife will give you happiness? Will you suffer just because I am by your side?' Having said these words in agony, she fell on the floor and rolled, like fish, with tears flowing from her lotus eyes. She was restless like life without a body! Please tell her how she asked me,* 'Where is the fierce forest?' even before we left Ayōdhya's gateway." After narrating these incidents to Hanuman, Rāma gave him a ring with fine gems to be presented to Seeta, and told him, "You are very knowledgeable; let the task you have taken upon yourself be attended with pleasant success." Hanuman made

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obeisance to Sugreeva, Rāma and Lakshmana and, led by Angada, proceeded southwards with the ferocious Jāmbavan, several other leaders, and a huge army.

13. ENTERING A CAVERN

After Angada and his vānara heroes, went in the southern direction, Sugreeva dispatched Vinatan and other heroes towards north, west and east. Accordingly, they proceeded with their powerful armies expecting to find out Seeta within the stipulated time of one month. *The vānara army that went towards the south (the seat of the bountiful Tamil language), headed by Angada, Hanuman and others, reached the Vindhya mountain which (because of the red dust, red stones, shining like the crimson sky, serpents, rivers and the moon) resembled the matted hair of Lord Siva.* The huge mountain peaks, the caves and all the mountains (a complete search of which would normally take a number of days) were combed within half a day by the vast vānara army. They formed themselves into different groups. One group would descend into all the hollows and pits; another group would leap into the air; and yet another group would get into places filled with water. There was no place in the mountain left uncovered by these vānaras. If they had not stepped into a place, then such a place was not created by Lord Brahma! After proceeding south for a distance of fourteen yojanas, the army reached the River Narmada. The vānaras searched for Seeta in places frequented by celestial damsels, swans and the Devas, and all the other places, including fields where sugar-cane and honey were available in plenty. Nowhere could they find Seeta, though they saw her hair in the black cotton soil, her face in the lotus flowers, and her teeth in the pearls washed away by the Narmada.

After their search around the River Narmada, where valiant and noble heroes and ferocious elephants of both sexes played, the vānara army reached the sparkling Hemakoota mountain (which excelled even heaven) shedding golden colour all around. Even the rivulets and waterfalls here appeared like molten gold. *The music emanating from the Vidyādharas who had come to the mountain, the sound of the feet of the celestial women, the trumpet of the elephants and the sound of thunder, all combined into one distinct sound in the Hemakoota mountain! Mistaking this to be Rāvana's Trikoota mountain, the vānaras thought of his wickedness, and instantly became furious. They were also happy that they would find Seeta here and wipe out Rāma's sorrow. When the vānaras began climbing the mountain, the lions, the*

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elephants and the yālis became frightened and started running. After thoroughly searching the mountain for a day, the vānaras were unable to find Seeta anywhere and decided that this was not Rāvana's place. They all descended and left the shining Hemakoota mountain. Addressing the huge army, Angada and other leaders said, "All of you search for Seeta in the southern region, and finally assemble at the Mahendra mountain situated near the sea." The leaders of the vānara army including Hanuman, moved separately and reached an arid region (bereft of water) the sight of which would frighten even the sun! No bird or animal could be seen, nor could the growth of grass or any tree be discerned in this desert. The whole place was barren. The vānara heroes suffered intensely from the heat and writhed like worms. They felt that this was the burning hell of the southern region. Their tongues protruded due to severe thirst. Blisters appeared on their feet. The restless vānaras tried their best to escape from the oppressive heat that almost prevented them from walking. Reaching the entrance to a cavern, they lost all hopes of finding Seeta and felt that the only course open to them was to die. Wanting to escape from the hot desert, they entered the cavern which was pitch dark as if all the darkness of all the four directions was hiding there afraid of the rays of the sun. The vānara heroes, unable to see each other, sighed aloud out of fright. They wondered whether there was an exit at all from the dark place and concluded that the time for giving up their lives had come. They asked Hanuman whether he could save them? Hanuman replied, "Do not fear. Hold my tail firmly, stand one behind the other and follow me." Hanuman then walked fast through the cavern, feeling its sides with his hands. Looking like the big Meru, Hanuman grew to a height of twelve yōjanas. He moved fast, with the light emanating from his two ear-rings (which flashed like lightning) dispelling the darkness!

After walking some distance inside the cavern, the vānara heroes came across a city which dazzled as if it was the solar region that had gone into hiding! Even the golden celestial world was put to shame by this city. There were beautiful lakes full of lotuses. The walls had golden minarets. The light that came from the glittering buildings, was more than the combined light of the sun and the moon. *The city was full of houses abounding in sandalwood paste, flower garlands, heaps of gold and jewels and shining garments, like the houses of the poets who sang in praise of the mighty shoulders of the famous Emperor Kulottunga Cholan.* The whole city, however, seemed like a lifeless painting without the movement of good men and women anywhere, even though there were plenty of fruits and food *like nectar, and honey as sweet as the language of Tamil!* Hanuman and the other vānara heroes thought that

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this city was probably Rāvana's abode, and became happy though baffled. They entered the city and started searching for Seeta. They saw many sculptures and paintings of the Devas and of human beings, but could not see a single being in the whole of that city. There were lovely tanks, fragrant gardens, parrots and koels, but women who could enjoy these beautiful things were not seen anywhere. The vānara heroes thought at first that all that they saw was an illusion. Later, they felt that they had reached hell. Then they imagined for a moment that they were in heaven. Again, the vānara heroes realised how absurd their surmise was. They started talking to each other, "If we have reached heaven, we ought to have died first. This has not happened; nor have we conceived or done any good act which has merited our entry into heaven. We have forgotten nothing that has happened to us earlier. Our memories are intact. When are we going to get out of this stupor that has overtaken us?" Jāmbavan then addressed his fellow vānaras, "The great thief Rāvana has created this wonderful machine in which we are helplessly caught. All the enthusiasm that we earlier had, has now disappeared because of the sins we must have committed in our previous births." Hanuman said, "Let us dig up the entire earth, cross over to the other side, or kill all the Rākshasās, and go upwards." These words encouraged everyone.

The vānaras entered the heart of the city and came across a damsel (looking like the feminine from all penances) with beautifully plaited hair dazzling the eye. This woman looked like the full moon and had breasts like pots of gold. Her fish-like eyes were looking at the tip of her nose. She had thighs like the trunks of plantain trees and her beautiful hands were close to each other and were placed on her thighs. She was standing absolutely still as though she was in a trance. Her dark beautiful plaited hair touched the ground. *Her name was Swayamprabha.* On seeing her, the vānara heroes bowed to her with compassion, thinking that she was Seeta. They went to Hanuman and asked him, "Is this woman Seeta? Please observe her carefully keeping in mind the features described to you by Rāma and tell us." Hanuman replied, "What quality of Seeta can you see in this woman? If a garland made of bones can be compared to a garland of pearls, then this woman is Seeta." Swayamprabha came out of her meditation and looked angrily at the vānaras. She said, "You obviously do not belong to this place. How did you come to this golden city which none can enter? What brought you here? Answer me." Hanuman replied, "Rākshasās who have been persistently harming the people of the world, have abducted Seeta. We, the messengers of the righteous Rāma, are looking for the place where she is hidden." On hearing the name of Rāma, Swayamprabha became immensely happy. She affectionately told the vānaras, "I wish to dance for joy. Let me heartily welcome all of

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you. Please tell me where Rāma is." Without any hesitation, Hanuman narrated in detail all that happened to Rāma. Carefully listening to Hanuman, Swayamprabha declared, "My sincere penance has at last been rewarded. I have now been released from a curse." She later made the vānara heroes bathe in the fragrant pool and consume food that was as tasty as nectar. She also soothed them with sweet words. Hanuman was curious to know who this woman was. He asked her, "Who is the lord of this city? What is your real name? O gracious lady steeped in penance, please tell us everything." Swayamprabha replied, "As a result of looking up to the heavens and doing severe penance after withstanding the heat of the sun and the rigours of the wind, a deer-faced Asura known as Mayan obtained this great city created by Lord Brahma, as a gift. Mayan sought my help to attain a celestial woman, as she was my close friend. I yielded to his request and brought her to this city. This woman, along with Mayan spent a long time here, immersed in lustful joy oblivious to everything else. I, too, stayed here, because of my attachment to my friend. Several days later, Devendra who came here in search of this woman from Devaloka, became furious with Mayan and killed him. Devendra asked her to tell him how exactly she became the victim of Mayan's infatuation. She said that I was responsible for all that had happened. Devendra cursed me and said, 'Stay here and take up the task of protecting this city'. I bowed to Devendra and asked him, 'When will my grief end?' Devendra said that the day the vānara messengers of Rāma arrived in this city, my sorrow would end. I have plenty of food to eat here; plenty of fragrant scents to smear on myself ; flower garlands to adorn my hair; exotic coloured robes to wear; and also several ornaments to beautify myself with. Still, I have discarded all of them, to come out of my curse. I have been doing severe penance hoping to see you. Dear friends, this cavern covers a distance of a hundred yojanas. I do not know how to go from here to the world above. Please help me to get out of this place."

Paying obeisance to the lotus feet of Swayamprabha who had conquered her five senses, Hanuman assured her that he would help her to reach the celestial world. Looking at Hanuman (who had saved them from getting drowned in a sea of darkness), the vānaras requested him to do everything that was necessary. Hanuman asked them not to fear. With a smile, he majestically rose (like a lion) to the sky breaking the roof of the cavern. This great son of Vāyu, lifted his two huge shining hands above his shoulders and came up as though he was an angry incarnation of Lord Varāha lifting and bringing up the nether world to the terrestrial world! Hanuman tore open the scintillating sky created by Lord Brahma. The mighty feet of Hanuman looked like the sacred feet of Lord Mahāvishnu when

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He 'sought' three 'feet' of land! Hanuman, with his frightful form, tore the cave for a distance of one hundred and forty yōjanas, and threw it into the sea with a great roar. To this day this city, cast by Hanuman into the sea, is known as the *'cavern island'*. Mighty Hanuman paused for a while after coming out of the cave and allowed Swayamprabha to go to the celestial world. Praising the prowess of Hanuman, the rest of the vānara heroes walked with him for a whole day, and finally reached a lake. The sun in the mean time reached the western mountain.

14. ONWARD JOURNEY

The vānara heroes saw a lake, drank the water, consumed honey, vegetables and fruits available near by and slept. Meanwhile, a Rākshasa who saw the vānaras resting, approached them. He was ferocious to look at and was like a mountain. His teeth were fierce and poisonous. His eyes emitted fire. He was like Yama! None had the courage to fight with this Rākshasa who was a terror to his fellow-beings and even to the Devas. Seeing the vānaras, he wondered, "Who are these who have the audacity to come and stay near this lake knowing that it belongs to me?" He hit the strong chest of Angada who immediately woke up from his sleep. Taking this Rākshasa to be Rāvana, Angada gave him a fatal blow. The Rākshasa collapsed and fell like a mountain hit by thunder. The shattering sound woke the rest of the vānaras and they surrounded Angada. When Hanuman wanted to know what had actually happened, Angada replied that he knew nothing about the Rākshasa whom he had just killed. The only one who recognised the dead Rākshasa was Jāmbavan. He said the Rākshasa was Tumiran, the owner of the lake. The vānaras thought that there might be more such Rākshasās coming to confront them and stayed awake the rest of the night. The next morning, covering some distance, the vānara heroes who were searching for the penn (Seeta), reached a river known as *Pennai** which was like a lovely woman possessing pearly teeth and a lotus face. They continued their search all round the place including the gardens, lakes, places where peacocks danced, small hillocks and all water sources. After crossing the beautiful, sacred *Pennai*, the vānaras went through several forests and mountains and reached a land known as *Dashanava* which had bountiful water and fertile fields.

Traversing a land called Ushanava they reached Vidarbha, the birth-place of sacred Sukra. All the forests and every other place in Vidarbha was searched by the vānaras

* *A pun is intended here. A woman is known as penn in Tamil, while Pennai is the name of a river.*

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who took the form of Védic students! Entering Dandakāranya full of yōgis and sages, the vānaras who could not find Seeta there, left for *Mundakaturai*. This place, inhabited by damsels capable of producing sweet music, was searched by the vānaras, faster than the speed of thought. Not finding Seeta there, they left for the beautiful tall mountain known as *Pāndu* which looked like Kailas. *After their search there, the tiger-like heroic vānaras became dejected and reached the River Gōdāvari which was like the garland that had fallen from Seeta's tresses while she was being carried away by Rāvana. The pearl-like river water resembled the flowing tears of Mother Earth who wept because Seeta was imprisoned. River Gōdāvari flowing with gems and gold also appeared like Rāvana's gem-studded necklace, plucked and thrown away by the impeccable Jatāyu.* The vānaras who could distinguish good from evil, unable to find Seeta, walked a long distance and reached the sacred river, *Suvanaka*, which could destroy all the sins of those who took a dip in it. Later, the vānaras traversed a long distance crossing fertile red paddy-fields, groves full of birds and swans and sugar-cane fields and lotus ponds, and finally arrived at the land of *Kulinda*, which abounded in gardens, rich with tender coconuts containing sweet water. Then they searched for Seeta in the seven areas of the *Konkan* land. After crossing the fertile lands on the west coast full of conches and beautiful black lilies, they reached the *Arundati* hills which had several tall peaks. Unable to find Seeta in these hills, the vānaras crossed the huge *Maragata* mountain replete with honey, and reached the *Tiruvenkada* hills, the northern boundary of Tamil Nādu! Sages and brahmins who studied the Védas, great and noble souls who had conquered hell, and the Siddhas and the Devas would bathe in the rivers flowing in these sacred hills. Even the animals which lived in the *Tiruvenkada* hills (on which the two sacred feet of Lord Venkateswara rested) would reach heaven, not to speak of the sages living there. The vānaras made obeisance to these great sages and searched for Seeta throughout the hills. Not finding her there, they took the form of sages well versed in Védas and left for *Tondai Nādu*.

Tondai Nādu had plenty of water everywhere. A number of mountains (kurinji land) with waterfalls could be seen throughout this country. Many houses were surrounded by forests (mullai land). There were also paddy fields (marudham) and coastal (neidal) tracts. Groups of ryots spurred their bulls to plough the fields. A convoy of swans frightened by this, trampled young white sprouts of paddy growing in the furrows made by the flow of honey from the pulp of jackfruit. A cluster of

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honey-bearing water-lilies resembling long eyes, appeared in the paddy-fields. Storks and cuckoos slept on plantain trees which looked like the thighs of women. Peacocks, on hearing the sound of different musical instruments (played on the streets), mistook it for thunder. The kendai fish got frightened mistaking the tender spathes of coconut trees (with chariot-like heads) for storks, their predators. Looking at the stem of a lily, the frogs mistook it for a rat-snake which habitually devoured them, and croaked with open mouths. A young male monkey held the pulp of a jackfruit in its small palm swarming with flies, like a cluster of bees swarming fragrant flowers in a garden. After traversing *Tondai Nādu*, the vānaras left for the incomparable *Ponni* region on the banks of the *River Kāveri*. They progressed with great effort in this land (which was also known as *Chola Nādu*) full of fields of ripe paddy, sugar-cane and areca-nut trees. While the ripe coconuts fallen from the trees made them stumble, the overflowing honey made them slip and fall. Flocks of black water-crows got in and came out of huge pots of cane juice mistaking them for fish ponds. Monkeys living in a grove which showered honey, mistook such profuse flow for a flood and remained on the tree-tops out of fear. Palmyra trees shone brightly with bunches of palmyra fruits. Ripe mangoes hanging from the mango trees near by gave out the fragrance of palmyras! In places where sprouts appeared in the mire, red lily plants and creepers sprang spreading their fragrance everywhere. *After searching for Seeta in this fertile Chola Nādu, the vānaras landed in the southern Pāndya Nādu, the centre of the sweet Tamil language. This country could well be called the celestial land, because it was replete with pearls and Muttamizh*.* The vānaras searched for Seeta in this southern Tamil land. Not finding her there, they became dejected and crossed *Pāndya Nādu's* passage of exit, battered by a persistent strong sea breeze with a deafening sound. The vānaras finally reached the *Mahendra* mountain which stood like an elephant carrying on it the southern direction!

15. SAMPĀTI

The southern sea with its white waves touching the sky and waving like rain-bearing clouds appeared, to the vānaras, to be welcoming them and telling them that doe-eyed Seeta was in Lanka. Simultaneously, another sea, the set of vānaras who were directed to search for Seeta after spreading out in the eight directions and reach the Mahendra mountain, also arrived. Even though all the vānaras had now

** The pearl is known as muthu in Tamil. Muttamizh refers to the three facets of Tamil namely, Iyal (prose), Isai (music) and Nātakam (drama).*

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assembled in a single place without anything untoward happening, they were all worried and spoke incoherently. Not knowing what to do next, they said out of fear, "The one-month period given by our leader, Sugreeva, is over. We have not yet found Seeta. If Rāma comes to know of this, he may give up his life. We have obeyed the orders of Sugreeva. There is nothing more to be done. Shall we stay here and do penance? Or shall we consume deadly poison and die?" Leonine Angada addressed the huge army of vānaras with a tinge of sadness, "As if we loved Rāma, we boastfully told him that we would search the entire world and bring news of Seeta. Having failed in our task, we neither have the courage to go to him and tell him that we have failed, nor are we confident that we will succeed in our mission even with some delay. I do not think that it is proper for us to retain our lives anymore. If I go back without executing the assigned task, my father, Sugreeva, will be furious and our leader, Rāma, will be unhappy. I cannot face such a situation! Therefore I will give up my life. O knowledgeable ones, please let me know what I should do."

Jāmbavan replied, "Wonderful words you have said! If you die, do we sit here and weep, or do we go to Sugreeva and Rāma and tell them of your death? What is there for us to go and convey? The best thing is for all of us to die and for you to live." Angada did not agree. He said, "My beloved vānaras! If you all die and I alone live, will the world approve of my action? I would rather die and go to heaven without giving room for elders to say, 'This Angada alone returned alive, allowing the rest to die'. *If all of us die without leaving anyone to convey the message of our death, someone else might convey the same to my mother, Tāra, and my father, Sugreeva. As a result of their grief, Tāra and Sugreeva might die, plunging Rāma and Lakshmana in sorrow. If these two brothers die, do you think Bharata and Satrughna will live? Finally Kausalya and the other two mothers and also the people of Ayōdhya will die. This is certain. What a pity that because of the misfortune that overtook our Jānaki, all persons in the world have to suffer endless sorrow."* Jāmbavan who was moved by the words of Angada, looked at him lovingly and said, "There is none living now in your dynasty except you and your father, Sugreeva. Only after we thought of this deeply, did we suggest that you should not die. Even otherwise, it would be delicate for anyone to convey orally the death of a leader. You deserve to be victorious. Please go to Rāma and Sugreeva and tell them that Seeta could not be found and that we are all dead."

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Hanuman intervened and said, "We have not seen even a portion of the three worlds fully. How can you become tired so soon, as though we do not have the capacity either to think and act properly or continue our search? Sugreeva will not point out to us the stipulated period until we search the nether world, the celestial world and the peak of Mount Meru. Therefore, it is good to continue our search for Seeta. If, even after that, we do not succeed in finding her, then let us give up our lives like Jatāyu who died fighting Rāvana." *Sampāti, the king of vultures, who was near by, was shocked to hear that his younger brother, the noble and ever-truthful Jatāyu was dead. Walking like a mountain and expressing his grief aloud, Sampāti approached the vānaras and asked,* "Who says that my truthful brother, Jatāyu, is dead? There is no one in this world who can kill my strong brother." Uttering these words, Sampāti shed copious tears from his eyes which resembled the overflowing sea. He wept aloud in great mental agony. He resembled a cloud descending on the earth with a tremendous noise. He walked so fast that he seemed to reduce to dust the creepers, trees and mountains that he encountered en route. He resembled a silver mountain, crawling on the earth, pushed violently by a wild wind. As soon as Sampāti came to the vānaras, they fled in fear. Only Hanuman faced Sampāti and said angrily, "You deceitful Rākshasa! Even though you have come in disguise, you have been caught by me and you cannot escape." *But on seeing tears flowing from his eyes, Hanuman felt that Sampāti must be a good creature, and started looking intently at him.* Before Hanuman could speak another word, Sampāti asked him, "Who was the one who had the strength to kill the invincible Jatāyu?" Hanuman said, "Please tell me all about yourself, so that I can tell you everything that happened." Sampāti replied, "I am the brother of Jatāyu, (born *after* me) who, according to you has died *before* me." Faultless Hanuman looked as if he had partially come out of the sea of sorrow. He informed Sampāti that Jatāyu was slain by the sword of the cruel Rāvana. The moment Sampāti heard this, he fell down like a mountain struck by lightning and wailed aloud, "O dear brother! Having lost my feathers, I am like a prisoner in chains. I should have died before you who never feared even the rays of Soorya. Brahma who arose from Lord Tirumāl is still alive; the earth, the celestial world, dharma and even the karpaga tree still exist. How then did you alone lose your life? You who can fly faster than even Garuda! How is it that you left the world alone, when both of us had come out of two eggs a long time ago? Even though Rāvana had conquered the three worlds, how could he confront you in a battle? It is improper for a Rākshasa like him to kill a bird like you!"

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As Sampāti went on wailing aloud, Hanuman consoled him with suitable words. Sampāti asked, "What was the provocation for the Yama-like Jatāyu to fight with Rāvana who had a sword in his hand?" Hanuman replied, "Seeta, the daughter of Janaka and the wife of our leader, Rāma, was abducted by cruel Rāvana. Your brother, Jatāyu, who always practised dharma, fought him asking him to release Seeta. When Rāvana did not yield, Jatāyu fought gallantly, hit his shoulders, and shattered his chariot. Realising that there was no other way of defeating Jatāyu, Rāvana took Lord Siva's sword and slew him." *Sampāti shed tears and said, "Truthful Hanuman! I commend the action of my brother who gave up his life in the cause of noble Rāma whose friendship he had secured. Jatāyu who sacrificed his life for the sake of Seeta is not dead. He has become immortal. There can be no greater happiness for me than this. Jatāyu has not lost anything by losing his life. He has gained eternal glory."* Sampāti then bathed in a nearby lake. Returning to the vānaras, he said, "I consider you as noble souls who can drive away sins by your goodness. You have done great service to me by giving me the news of the death of my younger brother. May I request all of you to utter the sacred word 'Rāma'? I will then, by his grace, be able to get back my lost feathers." The vānaras who heard Sampāti, stood in wonder. They were eager to examine the truth of his statement. The sacred name of Rāma was chanted by all the vānaras. Immediately, feathers started sprouting from the strong shoulders of Sampāti and almost reached the sky. Sampāti appeared powerful and strong, as if a burning sword had attained a sheath! The vānaras who watched the transformation, were spell-bound. With awe they extolled Rāma and requested Sampāti to tell them all that had happened to him before.

Sampāti told the vānaras, "Dear friends, your affection makes you a mother to me. Please listen. Jatāyu and I were born to Aruna, the charioteer of Soorya. We were the kings of fast moving vultures possessing lovely feathers. Once we both flew very high into the celestial world, least concerned about the presence of Soorya in his chariot. He was angry with us and started directing his scorching rays at us. My younger brother, Jatāyu, told me, "Please save me, my dear brother." I therefore flew above him and protected him from the severe heat of Soorya's rays. As a result, Jatāyu was saved, but my feathers were burnt and I fell on the ground. Soorya saw my plight and said, "When the vānaras, who will come in search of Seeta, chant the name 'Rāma', you will get back your feathers." My brother, Jatāyu, who was sad at what had happened to me, agreed to become the king of the vultures at my behest." Thinking of Rāma, the vānaras made obeisance to Sampāti and told him, "Dear father! We have come

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southwards hoping to find the despicable Rāvana who abducted Seeta." Sampāti told them, "Do not worry. I saw the sinful Rāvana carrying away sweet Seeta. He has reached Lanka and has imprisoned her there. You can go and find her because she is still there. Lanka, which is surrounded by the roaring sea, is a hundred yōjanas from here. Even the powerful Yama is afraid to look at Lanka because the anger of Rāvana is like a fire that can put out any other fire. I wonder how you vānaras will reach it. Even Lord Tirumāl or Ādisesha would find it difficult to enter Lanka. It is so well protected. All of you may not be able to go there together. One amongst you, he who is most capable, may go, conceal himself, find Seeta, and console her by conveying Rāma's words to her. If one of you cannot go to Lanka, inform Rāma that Seeta is in Lanka. I have to go now, as there is no one to protect and direct the vultures who may lose heart and wander in different directions. Please consider my suggestions and act." Saying so, Sampāti soared into the sky!

16. THE MAHENDRA MOUNTAIN

"Sampāti, the king of vultures will not utter a lie," asserted a few vānaras and added, "After what Sampāti has told us, we clearly know of Seeta's whereabouts. Let us think well and do one of the two things suggested by him. It is true that our responsibility will end if we go and tell Rāma and Sugreeva all that Sampāti has told us; but still, only if we cross the sea and find the place where Seeta is, can we be considered brave. At first we wanted to die because the time given to us by Sugreeva was over. Later we were daring to go back (with eternal blemish) and report our failure to Rāma and Sugreeva. Fortunately we are saved from both these blameworthy alternatives by the words of Sampāti, and now we have a good alternative. Who amongst us can cross the sea and cause the destruction of the Rākshasās?" Neelan and other vānaras openly conceded their inability to cross the sea. Angada said that he would be able to cross the sea and go to Lanka, but he might not have the strength to return from there. Jāmbavan, who was Brahma's creation, looked at the vānaras and said, "When Lord Mahāvishnu attained the form of Trivikrama and measured the whole world with His mighty foot, I went about announcing this great deed of the Lord, dashed against the Meru, and developed weak legs. Therefore, I cannot cross the sea, jump over the walls, exhibit acts of heroism which can frighten the cruel Rākshasās, find Seeta and return. To seek the help of someone else to go to Lanka will speak ill of us. There is only one amongst us who can do it and that is Hanuman. It was he who went first to Rāma and secured his friendship. None can equal Hanuman in planning and accomplishing a task untiringly." Jāmbavan turned to Hanuman and began extolling him,

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"You possess greater longevity than even Lord Brahma. You have deep knowledge of all the Sāstras, and so you can explain things clearly to everyone. Even Yama is afraid of your temper and strength. You are capable of fighting as ferociously as Lord Siva Himself. *You cannot be destroyed by fire, wind or water.* Even a powerful and efficient army cannot harm you. If anyone is to be compared with you, I can think of only yourself. You can jump beyond the world in one leap. *You have the capacity to distinguish good from bad.* Once you undertake a task, you can complete it without anybody's help. You have the ability to cross the sea, reach Lanka and return. If strong persons oppose you, they will be killed by you. None can surpass the strength of your shoulders. *Though you have a physique which can grow to the size of the Meru, you can also shrink to a tiny size and pass through a drop of rain water.* You have enough strength to dig out this very earth! You can go and touch the sun with your hand! You are faultless. You planned a strategy by which even the great and indestructible Vāli could be killed. You did not shed a single hair when Devendra angrily struck you with his Vajrāyudham. Even if all the forces in the three worlds collectively oppose you they can be vanquished by the strength of your shoulders. You easily mastered all the books written in Sanskrit from Soorya, while you went along with his chariot. You have grown without even thinking of a female. You have studied the Védas and grasped their meaning. Transcending aeons, you are considered by one and all, as Brahma Himself. You are deeply attached to the great Rāma. You have agreed to execute the orders of Rāma and Sugreeva to find Seeta and come back. You have the capacity to accomplish this successfully without any impediment. *You have realised that punyam alone is eternal. If circumstances are not congenial, you know how to lie low; you can also fight like a lion if there is war.* Even when you are confronted by obstacles, you will not run away. You possess an impeccable character fit to be emulated by Devendra and the others. You plan and think before acting. You are capable of transforming yourself into any form needed for the occasion. Hanuman! You are the only one who can cross this sea and return with news of Seeta. Go quickly and seek fame by giving us life. Obtain all information about Seeta and her devotion to dharma, convey the same to Rāma, and make him cross the sea of sorrow." Thus did Jāmbavan the son of Brahma inspire Hanuman to undertake the task of crossing the sea.

The sagacious Hanuman smiled, his teeth looking like the white flower buds inside a red lotus. With folded hands, he spoke words which pleased his vānara colleagues. He said, "Whether you ask me to dig out the city of Lanka and bring it here, or command me to kill all the obstructing Rākshasās, reduce them to ashes and bring the beautiful Seeta here, I shall do it. Do not fear. I will cross the hundred-yojana sea as

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effortlessly as Lord Tirumāl measured the world. I shall destroy all the contemptible Rākshasās living in Lanka, even if Devendra helps them. *All of you have the capacity to instantly cross the seven seas, conquer all the worlds, and bring Seeta.* Still, you consider me worthy of recognition, and you have entrusted me with this task as if to watch my smallness! Who is there more fortunate than I? Even if the sea rises with a roar and submerges the whole world that it surrounds now, or even if this world explodes and goes up in the sky, I shall cross the sea like Garuda, the celestial bird. You are going to see this. *Rāma's command and your compassion for me will act as my two wings and will help me to fly.* Till I return from the island of Lanka, all of you stay here. Please permit me to take leave of you now." While the vānaras congratulated Hanuman, the Devas showered a rain of flowers on him.

Reaching the top of the Mahendra mountain, Hanuman made up his mind to cross the sea. He assumed a gigantic form touching the very sky, enabling everyone to see him. He looked like Lord Tirumāl, who, as Vāmana, had acquired a similar form to measure the three worlds and had raised His divine foot upwards in the process. Hanuman with his awe-inspiring huge size, enabled all to realise the significance of his divine name, *'Tiruvadi'* (divine feet). Like the all-pervading sunlight and the cry of a warrior who would exhibit his unique valour in the battlefield, Hanuman, adorned with a garland, prepared himself to cross the sea and go to Lanka even before the sun with his chariot reached the western sea. Unable to withstand the weight of Hanuman, the Mahendra mountain full of ferocious lions descended into the earth. Its row of peaks were crushed. Hanuman, with his serpentine tail encircling his gigantic body, looked like the Mandara mountain resting on the back of a tortoise*. Big clouds with lightning thundered like the heroes' anklets adorning the legs of Hanuman whose mighty figure was seen by the Devas. Hanuman was seen standing and shining on the mighty Mahendra mountain as if it was the base for the golden pillar (Hanuman) that propped up the world!

** It was with the help of the Mandara mountain placed on the back of the divine tortoise that the ocean of milk was churned for the nectar of immortality.*

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SUNDARA KĀNDAM

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1. CROSSING THE SEA

Standing on the Mahendra mountain, Hanuman grew so tall that he almost touched the celestial world and wondered whether it could be Lanka. *But he soon realised that it was the abode of the celestials and therefore Seeta could not be there!* Later, he saw a few flag-ridden walls, gardens, and streets with buildings far away. Concluding that this was the ancient city of Lanka, he roared happily and slapped his shoulders. The thunderous sound shook the eight directions and the heavens. The immortal Hanuman then firmly pressed the blue Mahendra mountain with his feet, disgorging poison-toothed snakes spitting fire, as if he were pushing out the bowels from a torn abdomen. Sleeping lions which could not escape from the small caves were crushed to death. Countless birds flew from their nests and covered the whole sky, hiding the rays of the sun. Weak female elephants raised their tails out of fright, ran, and embraced the cloud-like bodies of their mates. Even the male elephants were frightened and flapped their ears. Binding the trees tightly with their trunks, they began to trumpet. The shining mountain emitted fire from its golden peaks, frightening and forcing even the tigers to run away with their cubs between their teeth. Hanuman's weight caused a landslide in that mountain full of teak trees. As a result, the Vidyādhara kings who used to live there took their swords and rose into the sky; the stars, the sun, the moon and the clouds rose above their respective positions, while the big snow-covered mountain sank into the earth, looking like a ship submerged in a stormy sea, with Hanuman standing out like the mast. A paste of red sandalwood, saffron, vermilion and anther was distributed on the mountain by the water from the springs. The red water falling on the earth looked as if the belly of the Mahendra mountain was torn and blood was gushing out in torrents. Hanuman's weight on the mountain made it spin like the Mandara mountain that had churned the ocean of milk. *The sages doing penance on the mountain-peaks, were thrown upwards into the celestial world even though they were only halfway through their goal of giving up attachment!*

As the Mahendra mountain split due to the weight of the mighty Hanuman, frightened celestial women embraced their consorts who appeared like Lord Siva embraced by 'frightened' Pārvati when Mount Kailas was lifted by Rāvana long ago! The Devas, sages and noble ones from all the three worlds showered flowers and scented powder on sagacious Hanuman wishing him success. When Hanuman prepared himself to cross the sea, his companions said, "O valiant one, you have

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shoulders as mighty as a mountain! Take care not to treat the task of crossing this sea with contempt though Sage Agastya had consumed it in one gulp long ago." Accepting their suggestion, Hanuman pressed his feet hard on the mountain, lifted his tail, shrunk his chest, expanded his mighty shoulders, thrust forward his two hands, lifted his head towards Brahmaloka and leapt to such a height that he could not be seen. Huge trees, boulders and several other objects on the Mahendra mountain rose into the air along with him as though they, too, obeyed Rāma's orders to cross the sea. *These objects, however, due to inadequate force, fell into the sea one by one as if pushed down by someone from above, and a Setu to Lanka was formed even before the appearance of Rāma's fury!*

The speed with which Hanuman flew, tore the sea. The nether world inhabited by the Nāgas sparkled! Hanuman considered himself blessed for being able to see the great Nāga world. Watching the speed of Hanuman, the frightened serpents mistook him for Garuda and ran amuck. Crocodiles and other aquatic creatures became quiet. *The frightened waves of the sea dashed against Lanka even before Hanuman reached the city.* The regional elephants trembled, dreading the impending destruction of all objects in the world, due to the speed of Hanuman who looked like the Trikoota mountain created in the southern region by the three peaks of Meru thrown into the sea by Vāyu. Hanuman moved fast, as if he were proceeding in a celestial chariot whose speed could not be visualised even by Devendra. Blessed by sages, extolled by the Devas and worshipped by mortals, Hanuman flew with the object of subduing the Rākshasa ruler Rāvana and appeared like Mount Kailas flying without Lord Siva. Hanuman had once taken the form of a brahmacāri. Now as a protector of dharma, Hanuman, more knowledgeable than even Lord Brahma, looked like the Meru going in quest of its offspring the Trikoota mountain, which had been separated from it long ago. Resembling his father, Vāyu, Hanuman charged with such speed that the stars were forced to tear the clouds and fall down, the sea rose high from its bounds, the sky shrank, the eight directions and the Meru mountain trembled, and the whole world appeared as if it was going to be destroyed. *The twenty-shouldered ten-headed Rāvana had done great penance by controlling his five senses. As if to indicate that the effect of his penance had come to an end, the flight of Hanuman created an illusion that the sun, instead of rising in the east and setting in the west, had changed his customary course and was moving south towards Lanka, after rising in the north!* Hanuman flying in the sky looked like the Disc used by the god of dharma and shone like the full moon seen in the north during pralaya. Hanuman lifted his tail and struck

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terror in the seven worlds, appearing like huge Garuda who had once instilled fear among the Asuras. The Devas saw in Hanuman's tail, Yama's death-rope in the act of measuring the sky like Lord Trivikrama's foot. Thanks to the grace of Rāma who had established the truth of the Védas, Hanuman's tail had the benediction of the very Hanuman who was dharma incarnate. Still, the tail, which looked like the cord of Yama, afraid of being seen by the intoxicated Asuras, was hiding behind him. Moving in the sky, it looked like Ādisesha suddenly loosening his grip on the Meru on sighting Garuda! The celestial chariots clashed and fell into the sea due to the wind generated by Hanuman possessing mountain-like shoulders. The wind thrown up by his flight tossed the sea destroying several species of fishes and huge whales which were several yōjanas long. *His untiring pair of mighty hands which gave him great speed, looked like the generous Rāma and his brother Lakshmana, moving in advance of Hanuman himself!*

A mountain known as Mainākam, which had all along been submerged in the sea, suddenly shot up like the elephant Irāvatam rising from the ocean of milk. It grew in size and stood in the way of mountain-like Hanuman. It shone with a thousand golden-coloured peaks and had flowing rivers which appeared like a white upper cloth on its body. The manner in which the mountain rose and touched the sky, gave the impression that Lord Mahāvishnu had risen from the sea to destroy the evil Rāvana and others. It rose like the lofty Mandara mountain, and looked like Garuda with huge feathers on both sides emerging from the nether world carrying the nectar of immortality. Looking at the rising Mainākam, one felt as if Lord Brahma Himself was coming out of the sea after His penance. *Like the moon that arose from the ocean of milk when it was churned by the Devas and Asuras, the Mainākam rose and touched the sky.* In that mountain, pregnant pearl oysters raised a mighty sound; dense sea-weeds looked like clouds; and white shells which brought forth big pearls, humbled the radiance of the full moon surrounded by stars. The peaks of Mainākam (with thousands of lustrous gems shining on all sides), were like the raised hands of a pearl diver diving deep into the venerable sea and rising to the surface with a variety of gems. Streams of water along with fishes rose from the mountain as if to assist Hanuman, but finally stayed in the mountain itself after seeing all that was happening around. *Mainākam rose from the sea, like sages coming out after emancipating themselves from the six enemies namely lust, anger, miserliness, infatuation, arrogance and jealousy, and the three human faults namely conceit, sinful karma and illusion.* Hanuman who was normally unafraid of anything, was taken aback when he saw the

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emergence of a mountain in less time than it would take for a black gram to roll on glass. He rolled Mainākam upside down, pushed it away, and began flying upwards into the sky. The mountain Mainākam became sad. It assumed a human form and addressed Hanuman, "Dear one, do not consider me an enemy. Once, Devendra dispatched his Vajrāyudham and shattered all mountains. Your beloved father, Vāyu, protected me then by keeping me inside the ocean. As there is nothing that I can do for you to show my gratitude to your father, I shall consider myself fortunate if you fly past my golden peaks. It was the ocean that sent me up to help you while you are on your way to do the bidding of Rāma. O brave one! I beseech you to consider me greater than even a good mother and accept my hospitality. Beyond that, is there anything else a friend can do to one who comes as a guest?"

Listening to the words of Mainākam, Hanuman became happy and was convinced of the goodness of the mountain. With a smile, he said, "I do not suffer from exhaustion because I am protected by Rāma's love. I will not eat any food until my task is accomplished. As for my enjoying your hospitality, I consider myself its recipient the moment you showered your honey-like compassion on me. What else is there that you can give me? *The greatest quality of those that bestow liberal charity is love; be such charity small, medium or big. No possession or trait is superior to love. For this body with life, is there anything stronger than the bone to sustain it? Similarly, is there a more worshipful trait than compassion, for anyone to possess?* Let me, for the present, move fast and reach Lanka. If, with my prowess, I complete the task assigned by Rāma and return, I shall accept your hospitality." Then he flew away in pursuit of his goal like the pralaya wind which united the sun, the moon, the celestial chariots, the stars, the clouds and all the objects in the universe! Watching the speed of Hanuman who flew over the sea, Soorya thought, "Even when this Hanuman was a child crawling with red feet, he had jumped on my chariot. I wonder on whom he is going to pounce now." Hanuman, with his sword-like shining teeth, possessed a physique that filled the whole sky. His long tail resembled the planet Rāhu capable of swallowing the sun. Like the full day that gave light as well as darkness, there was light above Hanuman's mighty body flying in the sky, while darkness prevailed beneath.

The Devas met Surasai, a noble woman with pure thoughts and said, "Hanuman has come to remove the misery caused by the Rākshasās in the three worlds. Please test his prowess for us." Assuming the form of a wide-mouthed Rākshasi, Surasai

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approached Hanuman and said, "You arrogant monkey frightening even Yama! You have come here as food for me." Growing gigantic with her head touching the sky, she told Hanuman that he should get into her fierce mouth and then try to escape. Shrewd Hanuman replied to her kindly, "I am sorry to find a woman like you suffering from pangs of hunger. I am now on my way to do some work for Rāma. If I come back after finishing his task, I shall offer myself to you as food. You can then eat me." Surasai laughed and said, "I swear that I will satisfy my hunger by enjoying your flesh now, while all the seven worlds are watching me." Agreeing to pass through her mouth, Hanuman said, "You may eat me if you can." Surasai immediately grew very big and opened her mouth wide. Even the entire world could not fill it. Hanuman who saw this, grew still bigger, making her mouth look smaller in comparison. Then he suddenly shrank into a tiny speck and darted into Surasai's mouth and out of it even before she could take a breath. The Devas who saw this, showered flowers on him and hailed him as their unfailing saviour. *When Hanuman (who was like lightning streaking through the clouds) assumed his normal size and was about to proceed further, Surasai got rid of her Rākshasi form and looked at him with the affection of a mother. She told him that there would be nothing impossible for him to achieve in future. With her blessings, Hanuman continued to fly.*

The performance of almost impossible feats by Hanuman, made the celestials sing and dance for joy. Several other living beings joined in singing the greatness of Hanuman. Sages chanted the Védas. Even 'thenral' the southern breeze, gave a new kind of joy. Hanuman's sweat was dried by the anther-mixed seasonal wind. Hanuman's ears consumed the sweet gāndhāra note played by the Vidyādhara kings on the stringed veena. Suddenly, Angāratārai, a Rākshasi who was like the Hālāhala poison, shot up like another sea from the fierce ocean, blocked his way, and asked him, "Who are you, going past me?" This Rākshasi had eyes that could see far-off objects and anklets which sounded like the roar of the ocean. She looked like the Asuras, Madhu* and Kaidava* who had gone in search of Lord Tirumāl for a fight in earlier days. Her fierce teeth resembled the crescent moon. Her skin was like the hide of an elephant. With her frightening form, Angāratārai, whose strong feet were caressed by the ocean while her head hit the top of the sky, stood before Hanuman. He immediately thought, "This Rākshasi seems to have swallowed both righteousness and compassion." Hanuman became sad that he had no option but to enter her open mouth

* *See chapter on Atikāyan in Yuddha Kāndam.*

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and tear her deep cavernous belly. Approaching her, he asked, "Why have you not realised my urgency even after seeing me moving fast without rest? Who are you? Why are you standing here like this?" Angāratārai told Hanuman, "Stop treating me lightly just because I am a woman. Even Devas are bound to forfeit their lives if they come near me. Lord Yama, too, cannot prevent me from eating the living beings sought by my eyes." As soon as Angāratārai opened her mouth, Hanuman entered it. The god of dharma felt sad, fearing that Hanuman would die. *In the mean time, just as Lord Narasimha emerged from the pillar, Hanuman tore the abdomen of the Rākshasi and came out.* Encircled by the bowels of the weeping Angāratārai whose mouth smelt of toddy, Hanuman, the greatest among those on whom the boon of immortality was conferred, rose once again into the sky like Garuda rising from the caves of a thorny mountain after catching serpents. Hanuman, with his raised tail and with the entrails of Angāratārai hanging around his body, looked like a huge kite flying in the sky.

Lord Brahma and the Devas were surprised at the prowess of Hanuman and showered flowers on him. The sages blessed him. Even Lord Siva was wonder-struck. Hanuman who tore the Rākshasi from her mouth to her belly, rose in the twinkling of an eye to such a height that the Meru appeared to be below him. *He flew faster than even the speed of thought. He realised that all his difficulties would end only if he flew without minding any obstruction that might come in his way in this huge sky which was as immeasurable as the unfathomable ocean. He felt that the only way he could succeed in securing an unimpeded path was to chant the sacred name of Rāma, and he did so with devotion.* After reaching Lanka, Hanuman, who coursed through the sky skirting the celestial region abounding in nectar-shedding karpaga trees, did not stop on the protecting wall of the city to watch the peaks within. Instead, he flew straight on to a huge coral mountain full of fragrant foliage beyond the city of Lanka. The impact of Hanuman's landing, shook the mountain violently, forcing it to shed its contents as if hit by the monsoon wind. With its base inside the ground, and its peak touching the sky, the coral mountain appeared to be measuring the distance between the earth and the sky. Standing firmly on this mountain, Hanuman surveyed the whole city of Lanka which was like a mirror created by a damsel of the celestial world to admire her own beauty. Holding his hands on his hips and looking at the city of Lanka, Hanuman thought, "It is foolish to say that the golden city of the Devas is like this city. If Amarāvati the capital of Devendra was equal to the city of Lanka, why would Rāvana rule the entire world from here? The celestial citadel is certainly not the most beautiful one. *If heaven is the place where*

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one can get everything one wants, and if heaven is the epitome of happiness, then this Lanka is heaven. It is said that the extent of Lanka is seven hundred yōjanas. The most exquisite objects available in all the three worlds can be obtained here. *Just as things that are visualised by highly erudite scholars can never be measured, the sights seen in Lanka are also immeasurable."*

2. HANUMAN EXPLORES LANKA

Standing on the coral mountain and continuing to wonder at the greatness of the city of Lanka, Hanuman thought, "It is impossible to make out whether the lofty golden mansions of Lanka with gems inlaid, touching the moon after piercing the mighty clouds, are made of lightning or the golden rays of the sun. *The mansions of the celestial world and of the nether world appear ordinary when compared to the mansions of Lanka, so craftily constructed that even the fierce wind that can frighten the Meru would become gentle `thenral' here!* The mansions appear as if the scented powders therein have been swept clean by sweet-tongued maids, with broomsticks made of streaks of lightning appearing from dark clouds, and sprinkled with water from the celestial Ganga! Raising a musical sound, the coral-like toes of Rākshasis smeared with the paste of red cotton flowers emit a rosy glow giving the cloud-like complexion of these women a crimson hue. Even the celestial Ganga flows above these lofty mansions touching the moon! *Women residing in these mansions have taught their parrots the sweet music of a child's lisp, which is sweeter than the music from the flute, veena and yāzh.* The walls inside the mansions are so bright that the reflections of women on them look real. Even Devendra's palace bears no comparison with these mansions. Just as the greatest gems in the world are no match for the Kaustubham on Lord Tirumāl's bosom, the craftsmanship of the celestial Viswakarma who created this great city of Lanka with his own hands, cannot be excelled by anyone anywhere in the world. All the trees in Lanka are exquisite karpaga trees. All the mansions here are made of gold. The women who are employed here to look after the Rākshasās, are from the celestial world. None other than Rāvana could have been responsible for such prosperity. *Who is there among the Devas, who has not served this Rāvana who appears to be superior even to the Trinity of Gods? All these riches are obviously the fruits of the great penance done by Rāvana.*

"This city of Lanka appears to have in it all the elephants except the eight regional elephants defeated by Rāvana and the lofty elephant known as Vināyaka, and all

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the chariots except the single-wheeled chariot of Soorya. Like the belly of Lord Mahāvishnu which can contain everything in this world, the city of Lanka contains all the horses in the universe except Soorya's seven horses. The roar of the sea is surpassed by the sound of the beating of huge drums; even this sound is drowned by the sound arising from the dancing-bells of women lisping sweet words. The dazzling sheds (containing horse-drawn chariots beautified by gems) humble the sunlight. Looking at the prosperity of Lanka, even heaven seems like hell. The splash of golden light emanating from the city of Lanka makes the dark Rākshasās appear golden-coloured, makes the moon appear flawless, and makes the sea resemble melted gold! *It is impossible to compare the manner in which the sun removes the darkness of the entire world, with the splendid manner in which the sparkling light coming out of the mansions of Lanka consumes the universal darkness. The fate of the sun before the shining mansions, can only be the fate of glow-worms before the sun!* The nectar shed by flowers, sandalwood paste, scented musk, karpaga flowers and the rutting fluid from elephants have entered the sea surrounding the city of Lanka and have made the fish living there shed their odour and acquire fragrance! Do we extol the celestial sculptor Viswakarma, or Rāvana who did sincere penance, or the boons given by Lord Brahma? The forests and groves in this city are all made of gold and the nine gems. Still they are so natural that they give flowers, fruits and honey! Can such a combination be obtained anywhere else in the terrestrial or celestial worlds? The five elements of water, earth, fire, wind and sky, seem to have realised that greatness has been conferred on them by the growth of the lofty pinnacle of this city. Will not even the Meru feel ashamed on seeing this tall peak of Lanka? Even the sun avoids this place, because his eyes are unable to withstand the dazzling light from the indestructible walls protecting Lanka. Only those who do not know this truth, constantly say that the sun does not go over the city of Lanka fearing Rāvana's wrath. He probably constructed strong and lofty walls in the city of Lanka to prevent the Devas from doing harm to the Rākshasās living here. *If, as a result of these extraordinarily high and beautiful walls, the wind, the clouds, the sun, the moon, the Devas, and Yama cannot enter the city of Lanka, then the indestructible dharma, too, cannot enter it. Full of lofty mansions, this city in the midst of the mighty sea, looks like the world created by Lord Tirumāl from His navel long ago!*

"In this city of Lanka, many can sing and many more can dance and play exquisite music. The Rākshasās enjoy the dance of the celestials released from the prisons of Lanka. The Vidyādhara women dance better than the celestial women. The Rākshasis

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with their hair darker than the black cloud, excel everyone else! When they all dance, one vying with the other, women from different countries come to Lanka, to study the art of dancing. The celestials wait like servants on the Rākshasās, giving jewels, clothes, garlands and sandalwood paste to them. While a description of their worldly joy will tire the tongue, the thought of it will be blamed by the very mind! Instructed by Lord Brahma, the celestial sculptor Viswakarma seems to have created this laudable city using the nine gems from the Meru mountain! While the roar of the sea is drowned by the majestic sound of music from the makaraveena, the cluster of clouds is contained in the smoke of aquila coming from the hair of the maidens living in lofty mansions. Whether inside the crystal mansions, or in the karpaga gardens, I see Rākshasās everywhere singing and dancing after consuming wine offered by their dear women with their sweet and 'harsh' words. But I see none suffering from anxiety!

"The red lips of the maidens of Lanka who speak and sing sweetly, look like a coral forest inside a sea; and with their sword-like eyes, they appear like a pond full of black lilies. Their cool faces in groups, resemble a lotus forest. Countless Rākshasās can be seen making one wonder how, in spite of such a large number of them going about in this place, the earth still keeps her equilibrium. The number of all beings in the world put together cannot come anywhere near the number of Rākshasās here. They have huge bodies and indomitable courage, and are out to destroy the world having obtained innumerable boons. They are experts in sorcery. The streets of the city are so long that going from one street to the next is like going from one country to another! *There are no males in this place who do not possess heroes' anklets, or hold the spear in their Yama-like hands or possess eyes which emit fire! There are no red-lipped sweetly lisping women whose hair swarming with bees is not dishevelled.* Resembling the Rākshasās with their red heads, the elephants of this city are affectionately followed by bees. These haughty elephants possessing white tusks and dark bodies move fast. Though it may be easy for our vānara army to reach this place, can they freely walk about in this city with its streets full of jewels discarded by the Rākshasās and the Rākshasis? A great quantity of sandalwood paste, the rutting fluid of elephants and the foam of saliva dripping from the mouths of horses flow like a river in the streets, taking into the deep sea, golden garlands, ear-rings and other ornaments thrown away by the Rākshasis. When I describe this place to Rāma, what will I tell him? *Will I say that in Lanka, the army of archers is bigger, or the army of lancers is*

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bigger, or the army of wrestlers is bigger, or the army of swordsmen is mightier? I just do not know." Thoughts like these assailed Hanuman's mind.

Hanuman, who stood surveying the city of Lanka, felt that the Rākshasās might come and find him. He reduced himself to the size of an ordinary monkey and stayed on the beautiful coral mountain. The sun dipped into the western sea. *The whole place was engulfed in darkness like the all-pervading sins of a liar (once rich because of the virtuous life led in the previous birth) who neither listens to the advice of the learned, nor is capable of sifting good from bad and is unaware of the impending doom! It looked as though the entire world was covered by the dark thick hide shorn by Lord Siva from the body of the 'elephant' created by the sages of the Tāruka forest! Darkness spread everywhere like the poison extracted from the thousand hoods of Ādisesha the king of serpents. The spread of darkness on that night could be compared to the spread of evil with the loss of goodness throughout the world, the moment cruel Rāvana imprisoned the chaste Seeta who walked in the footsteps of the generous Janaka.* The Rākshasās, who had the prowess to go in any direction, 'trampled' the darkness which had set in, and started moving freely. They either went to Amarāvati the city of Devendra, or to the world of the moon, or to the abode of Yama, doing the bidding of Rāvana. Celestial women, Vidyādhara damsels and Nāga women resembling a bunch of streaks of lightning, competed with one another and proceeded through the sky to carry out the wishes of the Rākshasās. The light emanating from the bodies of these celestials and Rākshasās, removed the darkness. The Devas who moved like painted dolls were frightened that Rāvana might be angry if they were late, and rushed, dropping their pearl necklaces, garlands and upper garments.

The moon rose like the sprouting of dharma once burnt by the scalding heat of the sinful deeds of Rāvana, but now revived by the rain known as Māruti (Hanuman). Like a beautiful damsel with a lovely forehead, the moon could be seen shining in the east, happy at the thought of Devendra's survival because of the arrival of Rāma's messenger! While the white waves of the sea swished like white chowries, the cool white moon rose as if Devendra's royal white umbrella had risen happily at the prospect of the imminent destruction of the Rākshasās. While the whole sky was like Sage Vasishta's charitable cow, Kāmadhenu, the moon was like the cow's udder and the rays of the moon like the milk that flowed liberally from it. *The stars in the firmament appeared like the flowers showered on Hanuman. These flowers, however, seemed to remain static in the sky without falling on the earth, fearing the wrath of Rāvana! While the jasmine flowers looked like slivers of moon, the bees which came in*

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search of nectar looked like bits of darkness. The hugging of the jasmine flowers by the bees, gave an impression that darkness and moonlight which were traditional enemies, were wrestling with one another. The all-pervading rays of the moon appeared to cover Rāvana's city of Lanka like a cloth protecting the city from dust. Hanuman had reached Lanka with the speed of Rāma's arrow. As a result, Rāma's fame crossed the sea, crossed the forest, and entered all parts of Lanka, like the moonlight !

Hanuman pondered over how he should enter the city of Lanka. He finally decided that the best way was to enter it straight. Leaving the coral mountain, he proceeded to the sinful Rāvana's abode with the blessings of the Devas. The impregnable walls of Lanka were tall, rising above the seven celestial worlds, with the sea serving as a moat. Made of gold, the walls appeared to outlast even the whole world which would be destroyed during pralaya. Hanuman, who approached the walls of Lanka, was lost in wonder. He thought, "It would be incorrect to say that the sun and other planets do not go over Lanka for fear of Rāvana. The real reason for their skirting this place is because of the insurmountable nature of the walls. To say that these walls are so situated that the whole Rākshasa clan could be contained in them would do no justice to their greatness, because the zenith of this universe itself is the height of these walls!" *As Hanuman was watching with amazement the cruel Rāvana's grandeur, he saw an entrance in the wall, which was like the entrance to the abode of Yama, with innumerable soldiers. Its size made Hanuman wonder whether it was a passage carved inside the Meru, or steps created to enter the celestial world, or a pillar planted to hold the seven worlds firmly, or a viaduct constructed for the entry of all the sea water.* He said to himself, "Even if all the living beings from the seven worlds come for a fight, they can very easily go through this entrance simultaneously. If this is the gate commonly used by the Rākshasās, I wonder whether these countless Rākshasās can be contained even within the seven seas!"

The huge gate was guarded by two hundred vellams of fierce Rākshasās with frightening teeth protruding from their mouths. Their red hair and angry red faces resembled a forest replete with the red flowers which blossom during autumn. They held weapons like the trident, the sword, the spear, Yama's bow, huge wheels, daggers, the pindipālam (a burning weapon), elephant-goads, slings to hurl stones and sharp wire-like threads which could slice human beings. *A number of bright lights shining inside, swallowed darkness and spat out daylight.* Hanuman saw Lanka's gate being protected by innumerable, tireless Rākshasās appearing like unending waves of the

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sea and wondered, "Which God or king can go past this huge gate? What will happen if Rāma assisted by the vānaras started a war here? *Crossing the dark sea is not difficult; but crossing this huge army protecting Lanka, is indeed a difficult task.* Even if there is a small slip in our thinking, it will be hard to find Seeta. A war with the Rākshasās may last for a number of days." Hanuman thought for a while and decided, "It is not only difficult for one to enter the city through this well-guarded gateway, but it is also unbecoming for a person who is endowed with capabilities to go through a conventional passage created by others. Therefore, let me enter the city by jumping over the huge wall which even the sun finds difficult to cross."

Hanuman approached the wall with the intention of jumping over it. Suddenly, he found Lanka Devi, who appeared to consider her longevity equivalent to the life-span of the city of Lanka, standing in his way. When she sighted him with his pillar-like arms, she stared at him with furious eyes emitting fire. She looked like the serpent Rāhu come to confront the sun. The shining Lanka Devi had eight shoulders and four heads and could go round the seven worlds. She had rolling eyes and had enough strength to vanquish anyone from the three worlds who opposed her. Ever impatient, she was always on the look out for anyone trying to enter the city from any of the eight directions. Sweating heavily, she roared like a thundering dark cloud. Her feet were adorned with bells which made a frightening sound. Her ornaments shone like lightning. Her eight hands held a vél, a sword, a trident, a mace, a deathly rope, a conch, a staff and a spear. Her fierce teeth were like slivers of the moon. Ejecting smoke from her mouth, she frightened even Yama. Her apparel had five colours. She could move as swiftly as Garuda! She was devoid of compassion. Her upper garment was made of golden cloth and her necklace was made of pearls from big oysters. Smeared with fragrant sandalwood paste, she spoke words which were as musical as the note known as tāram emanating from the yāzh. Her crown was adorned with a garland of flowers from which bees brought forth gāndhāra note. *A vigilant guardian of Lanka, this woman protected the city like the eyelids protecting the eyeballs. Repeatedly ordering Hanuman to halt, and moving faster than the speed of thought, she stood opposite to him.* When Hanuman greeted her, she looked at him with her raging eyes emitting smoke and shouted, "You senseless fellow! Having done something stupid, you pretend to be brave! I do not want to be angry with monkeys which roam about eating roots and leaves. Do not arouse my wrath by crossing this golden wall. Get out of this place." Fearless Hanuman controlled his anger. He said, "I have come here with the purpose of seeing this city. What do you lose if an ordinary

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monkey like me enters it?" Lanka Devi laughed derisively and said, "How dare you talk back to me instead of going away the moment I order you to go! Even Lord Siva is afraid to come to this city. Do you think it is an ordinary place for you to move about whenever you feel like doing so?" Looking at Lanka Devi who laughed at him, Hanuman laughed inwardly. Lanka Devi became furious. She continued, "Who are you? At whose instigation have you come here? What do you gain by risking your life? Even after my threatening words, how is it that you stand here instead of running away?"

Hanuman was firm. He told Lanka Devi that he would not leave the place without entering the city. *Lanka Devi thought, "This is not a monkey. Even the fearless Yama is afraid of me; whereas this monkey laughs at me like Lord Siva who laughed after consuming Hālāhala poison!"* Lanka Devi stood like a statue for some time looking at Hanuman. She foresaw that if he was not killed, Lanka would be destroyed. She said to him, "If you have the power to fight with me, do so. If you are capable of entering the city, let it be in a proper manner by going through the proper entrance." Speaking thus, Lanka Devi hurled her trident at him. Like Garuda catching a serpent with his beak and snapping it in mid-air, Hanuman caught hold of the trident and broke it in two. Lanka Devi was amazed. She started attacking Hanuman with all the other weapons in her hands. Hanuman snatched all her weapons and threw them far away. Realising that there were no more weapons left with her, Lanka Devi became furious and roared like thunder. She attacked Hanuman with full force using her powerful arms which could play with mountains and uproot them. Even before she hit him, Hanuman caught hold of her eight hands with one hand. He wondered what to do. He did not want to kill her as she was a woman. He therefore gave her a hard hit on her strong chest. She rolled on the ground like a mountain hit by thunder, and rose again with red tears flowing from her eyes. *Thinking of what Lord Brahma had said long ago, she told Hanuman, "O respected one! Please listen to me. Commanded by Lord Brahma, I have been protecting this city all these days. My name is Lanka Devi. Because of my devotion to my work, I lost my head. I have erred in fighting with you. I shall tell you something if you forgive me; and bless me. I had asked Lord Brahma how long I should protect this city of Lanka. He told me that one day a very strong monkey would hit me with his hand and hurt me and on that very day I could leave Lanka and go back to Him, as the destruction of the city of Lanka was certain.* Things have happened exactly as foretold by Him. Is it still necessary to stress that dharma will triumph and evil will be vanquished? Henceforth, you will be able to do all that

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you wish to do. There is nothing that is impossible for you. You may enter the golden city." After extolling Hanuman, Lanka Devi made obeisance to him and left for the abode of Lord Brahma.

Hanuman was happy that ultimately truth triumphed. Saluting Rāma's sacred feet in his mind, he jumped over the wall of Lanka and entered the city like a little yoghurt 'disturbing' exquisite milk! Inside the city he found that even the night was as bright as the day because of the dazzling light emanating from the sky-high mansions bedecked with jewels. Knowledgeable Hanuman wondered for a moment whether the sun had risen from the top of the Udayagiri mountain and was responsible for this light. *On second thoughts he felt, "The brightness of the light coming from inside the city is so powerful that even the sun would be ashamed to enter. He will only be like a glow-worm before the sun!"* Hanuman who was as lofty as the fame of Rāma, thought, "The darkness that should have filled this huge city of Lanka surrounded by high golden walls is absent because of mansions bedecked with shining gems. The Rākshasās living here therefore move about even at night. It is foolish of me to be seen walking on the open streets." Shrinking to a small size, Hanuman moved on the pavements close to the buildings. *With the zest of bees going after flowers in quest of nectar, with his sturdy legs that crossed the dark sea, Hanuman walked inside cowsheds, stables of horses and elephants, protected gardens and other places, in search of Seeta.* For those who have compassion, visualising Lord Tirumāl is easy. For others it is difficult. In that city of Lanka whose walls were studded with gems of different colours shining like stars, Hanuman appeared different in different places like Lord Tirumāl. The light from blue gems made him appear blue; the light from pearls made him appear white; and the light from rubies made him look red! Hanuman who went in search of Seeta saw celestial women in the gardens carrying water-pots on their frail waists which were unable to bear the weight of their cloth-covered breasts. These celestial women bathed the Rākshasis who looked like forest peacocks and swans. Watching this, Hanuman wondered, "Those who wish to acquire things, if they are to be really happy, must amass only penance. There is no use in amassing mere wealth. This has been shown here by divine destiny. Let people come and watch this."

In consonance with the grammar of music, the exquisite yāzh has seven strings that give seven separate notes (swarās). Some Rākshasis played on this yāzh, straining their tender fingers smeared with red cotton paste. Fearing that the sound of thunder might disturb the musical notes from the yāzh, their maids were shutting the mouths

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of the clouds with their flowery hands! Hanuman saw these maids. He also saw a golden auditorium bedecked with flowers and brightened by cintāmani, a divine stone that gave everything one wished for. While musicians in this auditorium sang to the beat of drums, Gandharva women danced to those lovely tunes. Some Rākshasis reclined in their beds and enjoyed all this music and dance! Some Rākshasis sitting on a marble platform, conveyed their thoughts through their eyes resembling black kayal fish and the vél. As though to 'water' the 'plant' of lust caused by separation from their husbands, they drank excessively. This turned their black eyes red like the eyes of their husbands, while their beautiful red mouths turned white. Other Rākshasis smeared red cotton paste on their coral-like feet, smeared fragrant sandalwood paste over their faces, applied collyrium to their eyelids and adorned themselves with suitable ornaments. Young Rākshasās who had the prowess to kill even tigers, entered the minds of young Rākshasis possessing spear-like eyes and harassed them. As a result, these Rākshasis spat venom through their nectar-shedding mouths with a deep sigh, with their tender waists shaking like lightning, and their anklets raising a wailing sound. Every time these Rākshasis kicked the Rākshasa youths, they were thrilled. All these scenes were witnessed by Hanuman.

Several Rākshasās were in a semi-conscious state, having consumed sweet honey coming from the sugar-cane press, mountain dens and groves full of bees. Holding their faces with their flowery hands, grief-stricken Rākshasis heaved deep sighs, suffering from pangs of love due to separation from their sinful husbands. *There were Rākshasis, who, because of their love for their weapon-wielding husbands, rested on their flowery beds with their bodies bereft of life. Induced by their lust, they had their eyes fixed on the entrances. When the maids sent by them to fetch their husbands were seen returning smilingly at the entrances, these Rākshasis became excited as if their lost lives were restored.* Red-mouthed celestial women with their tresses bedecked with flowers, sang auspicious songs. The beating of the drums drowned the sound emanating from their conch-bangles, girdles, dancing-bells and anklets. In the midst of all this, some Rākshasis worshipped their family deities with flowers. The bright light from their ornaments fought like bows and swords and completely wiped out darkness. These Rākshasis used their spear-like eyes (extending up to their ear-rings) to pierce the hearts of youngsters! Like peacocks following the clouds, the Rākshasis followed the sound of conches and big drums which roared like clouds. Forgetting the minor quarrels with their husbands, the Rākshasis opened their eyelids slowly and revealed their collyrium-smeared eyes. Hanuman saw all this.

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With their senses, minds, thoughts and pride vanishing with the arrival of their husbands with whom discord was feigned by them, the Rākshasis moving their slender waists, walked gently like swans, entered their rooms, and shut their doors. The Kinnara singers, males and females in pairs, sang songs. Nāga girls from the nether world sang for long blessing everyone. Some Rākshasis in the company of others, boarded chariots decorated with pearls and went in a procession through the main thoroughfares of the golden city of Lanka and entered the abodes of their husbands. A number of them were moving in bridal attire, with the drums thundering like clouds, the Devas and the celestial women offering blessings, and the sages surrounded by their wives offering auspicious greetings! After seeing several Rākshasis, Nāga maidens, impeccable Vidyādhara women (with moon-like faces) and others, *Hanuman saw Kumbhakarna.* The hall where Kumbhakarna was resting was seven yōjanas wide and was bright, like the impeccable huge, hall where Devendra was crowned. On a big bed inside this hall, Kumbhakarna, looking like the embodiment of all the sins committed in this world, was lying as if he was Ādisesha. Comforted by the southern breeze from his garden full of karpaga trees, Kumbhakarna was lost in sleep. Women from the celestial world were found pressing his feet and legs gently. Looking at their moon-like faces, moonstones embedded in the pillars of the hall sprinkled cool water on the face of Kumbhakarna. Hanuman was about to be sucked into Kumbhakarna's nostrils by the strong breath he drew. Deftly using his palm to protect himself, Hanuman jumped far away. *The fierce teeth protruding from Kumbhakarna's mouth made one feel that this Rākshasa, after considering the moon his enemy, had cut it into two pieces and fixed them on either side of his mouth! Like the sea staying for long within its bounds (till the time of pralaya) and like the Nāgas bound by the mystic mantrās, the sleep of Kumbhakarna was undisturbed.*

Mistaking Kumbhakarna for Rāvana, Hanuman (who was like one among the Trinity of Gods) was angry and his eyes became red emitting fire. But when he went close to the sleeping Rākshasa, he found he did not possess ten heads and twenty shoulders. *Realising it was not Rāvana, the fire of anger in Hanuman was at once put out by the cool water of wisdom.* He thought, "Whoever is lying here is going to live only for a few more days. Let him live till then." Leaving Kumbhakarna's palace, Hanuman who was the very symbol of Rāma's fame, moved about, searching for Seeta in mansions, palaces, places of worship, auditoriums and discourse halls. Entering all places like smoke and air, he became small while searching for Seeta in a small place, and became big while looking for her in a big place. *He was like Lord Tirumāl*

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becoming one with the tiny atom as well as with the huge Meru mountain. After going round several places, he entered the palace of Vibheeshana, who was born in this world endowed with all good qualities as desired by the celestials as well as those from the world below. *Vibheeshana was lying inside his coral palace surrounded by karpaga trees. Hanuman went close and looked at the good and righteous Vibheeshana. Realising that he was a faultless, cultured being endowed with noble qualities, Hanuman shed his anger.*

Observing that none of the celestial and other women with faces like the full moon and lips with red colour looked like Seeta, Hanuman crossed their mansions. *Moving faster than his own thought, he reached the entrance of Indrajit's palace where Devendra had been imprisoned before!* The palace was well guarded by several thousand Rākshasās (with ferocious teeth) who had fierce weapons in their huge hands. Hanuman entered this well-protected palace where even smoke could not enter, and saw Indrajit lying there. *Watching him, Hanuman felt that the six faces and twelve arms of Lord Muruga, the son of the three-eyed Lord Siva, had been reduced to one face and two arms, and the handsome form was lying there on the bed. He thought, "Who can understand this exquisite form resembling a ferocious lion? He looks more like Lord Muruga and not like the son of a Rākshasa. Rāma and Lakshmana will have to fight for a number of days with him. Comparing him with anyone other than the Trinity of Gods would be senseless. With the help of a warrior like him, it should not have been difficult for Rāvana to have vanquished the three worlds."* Feeling that it was futile to stay there any longer, Hanuman (as famous as the sacred feet of Rāma) went on with his search, going in and coming out of thousands of buildings including the mansions of Akshakumāran, Atikāyan and several other warriors and ministers.

Rāvana's palace was surrounded by three huge moats. The mighty Hanuman who had once leapt to catch Soorya mistaking him for a fruit, reached the middle moat and was amazed at its depth and width. He who strode throughout the world where Rāma's fame was known, thought, "The king of the ocean (which I easily crossed) probably wants to wipe out his shame! By collecting the water from the seven seas, he has made it impossible for me to cross the moat. To say that it has great length and breadth would be to display one's ignorance, because even if innumerable persons were to dig the entire earth till pralaya, it would be impossible to create a moat of this dimension. The seven seas seem to have converged into this moat out of sheer fear of Rāvana. Even if I try to cross it with twice the speed with which I crossed the sea

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earlier, I will not succeed." The moat which cannot be described by words, was as vast as the army of Rāvana. It emitted the fragrance of the rutting fluid from elephants, the foam from the mouths of horses, saffron paste from celestial women, and aquila smoke fed to women's hair smeared with the paste of musk, honey and sandalwood paste. Water-borne birds, herons, swans, storks, cakravaka birds, king-fishers, crows, water-hawks and several other birds raised a furore in that moat. The enormous accumulation in the moat of aquila smoke, musk paste and red cotton belonging to damsels, gave the male elephants which bathed there, a new scent and complexion. As a result, they were misunderstood by their female counterparts and this led to quarrels! The fragrant lotus-flowers closed up in the nights as if in sympathy with the depressed face of the lotus-born captive, Seeta! *Polished marble stones fixed on the banks of the moat shone so brightly that it was hard to distinguish the surface of the water from its banks, just as it is hard to differentiate clear-headed persons from small-minded ones, when they are together! The water appeared to be a mixture of the ocean of milk and the seas with different colours, because the upper and lower parts of the moat embedded with different gems like pearls and sapphires, gave out different colours.* Hanuman made up his mind and finally crossed the moat and the huge walls, in the same manner in which he had crossed the sea. Reaching Rāvana's unapproachable huge citadel, Hanuman searched all by himself for Seeta, in three hundred thousand streets spread over twelve yōjanas, where even Yama was afraid to enter.

During that part of the night, Hanuman found that those who had been drinking had stopped doing so; the city which had been active and replete with the sound of the roaring sea became quiet; singing of songs came to a halt. The three types of drums became silent; and the workers no longer worked. All the people in the city began to sleep. Even the horses with exquisite colours slept peacefully with their heads drooping. Rākshasis who were with their husbands, as well as those who had quarrelled with their husbands, slept with fragrant flowers tucked in their hair. Rākshasās with powerful shoulders, after returning from their fights, slept happily on the bosoms of their young peacock-like wives. Those who had lost themselves in a pool of liquor, entered their bedrooms filled with the fragrant smoke of aquila and the humming of bees that sought nectar, and slept soundly unable to move. On that midnight, songs with music played on various instruments came to a halt; the sky closed its 'eyelids' causing darkness everywhere; veena music that cooled the minds, came to a halt; the 'eyelids' of the leather drums closed; and all the doors were shut.

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'Thenral', the southern breeze, brushed many flowers and blew over the lives of Rākshasis who were separated from their husbands, making them shed torrential tears from their dark eyes. Having lost their shyness, the minds of these lonely Rākshasis got scorched.With the depletion of ghee in the lamps, several lamps got extinguished. The southern breeze extinguished the remaining lamps as if overtaking enemies who were lying exhausted.

However, the magnificent light from the nine gems worn by the women of the city, acted like lights which could never be extinguished. All good and wise persons, all those who always did the duties allotted to them and all sages, slept soundly. Even those who were mentally deranged slept peacefully. Everyone in that city of Lanka, slept during that midnight when noble Hanuman who had conquered all vices, traversed millions of streets, crossed the moat and the wall surrounding Rāvana's palace and went inside. The palace of the battle-happy Rāvana appeared like the full moon. It was surrounded (like the moon surrounded by stars) by palaces close to one another where his beautiful Rākshasis stayed. Hanuman reached a street full of mansions occupied by fine celestial damsels whose faces vanquished even the full moon without the dark spot in it. *Hanuman (who had completely cast away the malady of possessiveness) entered all the gateways, shrinking into a form finer than a thread or the gentle 'thenral' breeze.* Some of the young damsels who had given their hearts to Rāvana were restless and heaved a sigh. They were like portraits with their lotus eyes wide open without any movement. A few damsels closed their eyes even though they were awake. Whether they did so because they were afraid of Manmatha's arrows, or because they wanted to seek the pleasures of pleasant dreams, none could say. A few young beauties who were unable to see Rāvana in person felt that there was no point in shedding tears needlessly and wondered whether they could at least see him through the portraits drawn by them. Some women felt that the 'thenral' breeze which gave coolness to others, caused them agony. A few women were like the golden creepers of karpaga trees. Their shoulders listlessly dangling, they began to sleep on swinging beds. *To them, songs accompanied by the music of the yāzh acted like the sting of a scorpion!*

It is said that even when all the seas join into a gigantic pralaya flood, if there is anyone found dancing instead of being destroyed, it is only Lord Siva. In praise of this great Lord, exquisite songs were sung by Rāvana. *The women of Lanka in turn sang in praise of Rāvana!* After crossing the entrances to the houses of all these women,

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Hanuman (steeped in justice) reached the abodes of Rākshasis who belonged to the family of Rāvana. The gems in the walls of the magnificent mansions of these Rākshasis emitted bright light simulating tender sunlight. Darkness was consumed instantly, and there was brightness through night and day without the assistance of any other light. In these mansions, the Rākshasis were 'closeted' with their love for Rāvana, while their thoughts were away with him. A few Rākshasis with their exquisite hair, considered the beds spread with fresh flowers as their enemies and sought cool slabs laid with crystal stones to lie on. Still their hearts burned with raging lust. The bodies of some Rākshasis looked like the bright and boundless sky, their foreheads were like the crescent moon, the pearl necklaces they wore were akin to garlands made of stars, their waists were like streaks of lightning and their eyes looked like dark clouds in the sky. *Celestial maids wearing ear-rings would bring water from various places where the celestial Ganga flowed. Some of the Rākshasis, angry with these maids because the water they brought was not cool enough, would go to the top of their gem-set mansions, pierce the clouds with their fingers and then bathe in the water that dripped from them. Some others would gamble on a golden plate using rubies (snatched for them from king cobras by their beloved Rāvana), as pawns, with ornaments and crowns of Vidyādhara kings as stakes!*

In a golden palace, under a shamiana of pearls, while the celestial girls sang to the rhythmic beat of drums, the Nāga girls played instrumental music and beautiful-shouldered Apsarases danced. These were watched by the Rākshasis. Some of them afflicted with love, would shed streams of tears from their dyed eyes after giving up their sleep. Yet others, not knowing what to do, would sing sweet songs to the clang of cymbals. Some of the Rākshasis were intoxicated. They made a great deal of noise dancing recklessly with roving eyes. *Consuming the blood of several animals and drinking liquor which was like cobra poison, a few other Rākshasis raved like mad women.* Yet others drank toddy which was white like buttermilk. They shouted, "Look at us! We are possessed." Lifting their two hands above their heads, they danced in intoxication and fell exhausted. Hanuman entered rows and rows of houses of countless Rākshasis. He also went into the streets where the Siddha and Vidyādhara women lived separately. Some of these Vidyādhara women were so deeply infatuated with Rāvana, that they were upset that he no longer came to them. *Due to pangs of separation, they felt as if serpents had entered their ears when exquisite music was played by professional musicians.* The Vidyādhara women always showered their love on Rāvana who would subdue the helpless sages and Devas. The moon, as if to show his anger towards these

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women, burnt their breasts, while he gave cool rays to others! Hanuman searched for Seeta in all the mansions of these countless women and then approached the mighty palace of Rāvana who ruled the three worlds.

Rāvana's wife, Mandōdhari, was the daughter of Mayan. Her beautiful face excelled the beauty of the moon. Looking at Mandōdhari's mansion which was close to the palace of Rāvana, Hanuman thought, "The object of my arrival here appears to have been fulfilled after seeing this mansion which stands apart from other mansions. This is where Rāvana has probably imprisoned Seeta who is more precious to Rāma than his own life. If the houses here appear like gems, this mansion I see before me is like the very Kaustubham decorating the bosom of Lord Tirumāl!" Mandōdhari was sleeping in her palace. Rambha, Menaka, Tilottamai, Oorvasi and other celestial beauties were holding her feet which looked like Manmatha's quiver. Sweet veena music (making even sugar-cane appear bitter) played by the celestial women, flowed into the ears of Mandōdhari, while the fragrance of karpaga flowers entered her nostrils! *The great 'thenral' breeze appeared to be so scared of Mandōdhari's mates that it kept moving to and fro like a cradle, as if beckoned by these women!* Bright light, more fascinating than the light emanating from all the gems, was coming out of the body of Mandōdhari. Seeing her asleep and mistaking her for Seeta, Hanuman suffered from intense agony as though he was consumed by fire. He said to himself, "The purpose for which I have obtained this body (with bones) is lost. If this woman whom I see before me is Seeta who has disgraced her great parentage and lost her divine chastity, then let me be destroyed today along with Rāma's name, fame, Lanka and all the Rākshasās." Hanuman soon realised that he was wrong. He said, "The woman I see here is different from Seeta who is a beautiful woman belonging to mankind. Then who is this woman before me? Could she be either an Asura woman or a Rākshasi? Can a woman's love for Rāma ever change even towards Manmatha? I have erred. Even though a few noble feminine features are found in this woman, I also see in her body indications of unlimited sorrow in store for her. The way she is talking to herself shows that she will soon lose her husband and Lanka will be destroyed." *Realising that she was not Seeta, and dismissing from his mind any more conflicting thoughts, Hanuman left Mandōdhari's mansion.*

Hanuman then entered a huge palace that made even the Meru look smaller. Immediately the earth and mountains shook; the shoulders, eyes and the eyebrows of all the Rākshasis twitched on the right side; the eight directions trembled; there was thunder from the sky unaccompanied by lightning. Sacred pots burst! Hanuman

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realised the full significance of these omens. He felt, "Everyone has to reap the consequences of virtuous as well as sinful deeds; there is nothing which is stronger than fate." The palace was guarded by an army of Rākshasās with strong legs and spears in their hands. Inside the palace, knowledgeable Hanuman saw handsome Rāvana sleeping like Lord Tirumāl on the thousand-hooded serpent Ādisesha. Crowns bedecked with jewels decorated his heads like the tender sun seated on Udayagiri! Looking like Lord Narasimha, spreading out several heads and several shoulders, Rāvana was found asleep. On either side, thousands of women from the golden world were fanning him with golden fans. The resultant breeze was mixed with drops of nectar from the karpaga flowers. *Each time the breeze grazed Rāvana, he thought of Seeta and sighed.* On his powerful shoulders could be seen scars created by his fight with tuskers and also fresh wounds inflicted by Manmatha's arrows! The pleasant 'thenral' breeze touched his body covered with sandalwood paste, and fanned the heat caused by his lust.

The sleeping Rāvana whose heart, soul and mind had gone in search of Seeta, was like a snake-pit without snakes inside. Rāvana had fierce teeth protruding on the sides of his mouths appearing like the overflowing fame of the Devas which he had 'consumed' in battles with them! The heat that emanated from him had burnt even the bed of flowers on which he slept. Drops of sweat looking like beads on his body became so hot that the bees in his garland were destroyed, and he sighed with a hot breath. Rāvana's mind which was always with Seeta, was grinding his very life on a grindstone by 'watering' it with the lust for Seeta. Whenever Seeta's form rose before him he was thrilled that after all she had yielded in some way and had come into his 'chamber'! He possessed such magnificent shoulders that once a woman embraced one of them, she would never shift herself to another, like a peacock unwilling to leave one mountain and go to another. While the gems on Rāvana's chest shone like the sun, his chest had the strength to vanquish the prowess of the three weapons of the Trinity of Gods. *Long ago when Rāvana was engaged in a fight with the elephants guarding the eight directions, the bees swarming his garland and the bees swarming the rutting fluid of those elephants, had exchanged places; and the sandalwood paste smeared on Rāvana's bosom and the kunkumam on the elephants' foreheads suffered the same fate.* Rāvana's chest was ploughed by the tusks of these regional elephants, while his feet contained scars from the frequent contact of the crowns of kings who paid obeisance to him. Hanuman who had shrunk to a size smaller than Vāmana, realised after intently looking at Rāvana's ten heads and twenty shoulders, that it was Rāvana who

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was sleeping there. Even before his mind could start functioning, his eyes emitted red-hot fire which threatened to split the world into two.

Hanuman told himself, "I will kick the crowns worn by Rāvana and his ten heads. If I do not do so, what is the use of the strength of my shoulders, or my long-standing fame? My devotion to Rāma can only be considered a pretence, if Rāvana is allowed to live even after imprisoning Seeta. I shall immediately sever all his shoulders and slay him after kicking his heads and rolling them to the ground. I will destroy this city. I am not concerned with what happens later." Hanuman then got up, wrung his two hands and thought, "What I wanted to do is not what is commanded by Rāma! It is not proper for sensible beings to start doing one thing and end up doing something else! What a blunder I was about to commit! Can noble ones do something without giving deep thought, even if they possess the strength of Lord Siva?" *Hanuman controlled his anger like the ocean which, even though it has infinite capacity to destroy the whole world, bides its time and never transgresses its bounds till the arrival of the appropriate time.* He continued to think, "Let this great anger which prompted me to attack Rāvana, subside instantly without the knowledge of others. My action would have brought discredit to the prowess of the bow of Rāma who is out to destroy the Rākshasās." After calming down, Hanuman was relieved by the thought, "Rāvana is restless because of his unfulfilled lust. This tells me that Seeta is safe." Giving a pause to his thoughts, Hanuman decided that there was no point in his continuing to stay there, and left the palace.

Hanuman became anxious about Seeta because he was not able to find her in the huge city of Lanka. With concern he felt, "Rāma must be waiting, hoping that I will find Seeta and return, and Sugreeva must be thinking that I will retrieve Seeta and bring her back. Whereas, what I have done so far has served no purpose. Has Rāvana killed and eaten Seeta whose chastity is indestructible? Has he imprisoned her in some place beyond Lanka? What shall I tell Rāma after I go back to him? Unless I die, I will not be relieved of this great sorrow as I cannot face Rāma. At the same time, I do not feel like dying till I destroy the Rākshasās. The time set for finding Seeta is over. I have come here leaving Angada and the others who wanted to give up their lives because they could not find Seeta. What right have I to live? Probably, I am bereft of the good quality of punyam! There is no one whom I have not seen in this huge city of Lanka spanning seven hundred yōjanas. Yet, I have not been able to see Seeta. *Having crossed one sea, I am about to fall into another, namely the sea of sorrow.* Shall I catch hold of

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Rāvana, make him vomit blood by hitting him hard with my strong hands and compel him to show me where Seeta is hidden? Or shall I set fire to Rāvana and Lanka and make them melt like wax? I know that if I ask the Devas and other good souls to show me where Seeta is hidden, they will not have the courage to do so as long as Rāvana is alive. How can I, an ordinary soul carrying the burden of this body and life, find the whereabouts of Seeta? Sampāti, the king of vultures, said that Seeta was in Lanka. How could that be false? Why should I still suffer so intensely retaining this body and life without dissolving Lanka in the sea and finding Seeta? Giving up my life after excavating Lanka, sinking it in the sea, and destroying Rāvana, will be the proper thing to do." *Like the all-pervading Lord Tirumāl who was inside his heart, Hanuman went into every nook and corner of the whole of Lanka without leaving out even the space taken by a gingili seed. Later, he entered a flower-garden full of birds and searched there also. Suddenly, Hanuman saw another garden full of flowers dripping with nectar!*

3. SEETA SEEN

Entering the new garden, Hanuman said to himself, "If I find Seeta here, my sorrow will come to an end. However, if I do not see her in this garden, I shall dash this Lanka against the Trikoota mountain, destroy it, and then die. There is nothing else that I can do." The Devas who watched Hanuman, entering this garden, showered flowers on him. Let us make bold to narrate the state of Seeta imprisoned by Rāvana here. An emaciated Seeta with all the parts of her body shrunk to the size of her thin waist, sat amidst stout Rākshasis who constantly threatened her. She looked forlorn and withered like a dry medicinal plant growing on rocky soil without a drop of water for sustenance. Peacock-complexioned Seeta with a nightingale's voice, had given up sleep. Her eyelids no longer blinked. Bereft of brightness, her body was like a lamp kept in sunlight. In the midst of Rākshasis with sharp and protruding teeth, she looked like tender doe amidst tigers. All that Seeta could do was to think and look in the direction of Rāma and worship him. She would fall down, get up, lament, tremble with fear, wail aloud, shed tears and heave a sigh. There was a time when slender-waisted Seeta's eyes used to be called 'rainy eyes' because of their coolness; but now as if to justify that description, intense grief brought from these eyes a torrent of tears which fell like a waterfall down her mountain-like breasts. The moment Seeta saw any dark object like a dark cloud or collyrium, she would think of Rāma and tears would flood her eyes like the waves of the sea. *If the grief of a woman separated from her noble lover were to attain a human form, that was Seeta. The soft garment worn*

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by her would become wet whenever she wept thinking of the dark cloud-like Rāma possessing coral-like hands and feet; at the same time, her body would get heated as a result of the hot sighs brought forth by the very same grief she was suffering from, and would dry up her wet clothes. Thus, Seeta's garment alternately became wet and dry!

Even if she wished to give up her life, Seeta feared she would not be able to overcome the strength of fate! She frequently looked in all directions hoping that Rāma would soon come to wipe out the ignominy that had sullied his great race. The twisted strands of hair which pressed her cheeks, looked like Rāhu swallowing and then bringing out the blemishless moon. The only garment she had was the single yellow cloth she wore. The body that she possessed now had not been cleansed in the water inhabited by swans. *She thus looked like a smoke-covered portrait painted with nectar by Manmatha!* Seeta thought, "Perhaps Rāma who went after the deer, was not found by Lakshmana. Even if he was found by Lakshmana, these two might not have learnt about my abduction; even if they did know about it, they are probably not aware of the presence of the city of Lanka in the midst of the sea." Seeta suffered from acute agony; the kind that is experienced when fire is thrust into an open ulcer. She felt that Jatāyu must have died after his fight with Rāvana, and that there was none to inform Rāma and Lakshmana of her being carried away. She wept in despair fearing she would not be able to see these two again in this birth and was in constant agony. *She told herself, "Probably my husband must have considered me a foolish woman and discarded me after learning from his younger brother of the harsh words addressed to him by me an accursed woman.* All this must have happened because of my sins in my previous birth." Her tongue would become dry, and her senses would ebb with intense agony. Not moving from her place, she would feel sad, wondering who would serve Rāma's meal on a proper leaf! She would heave a sigh thinking of how Rāma would suffer with none to look after the guests in her absence. She would swoon, wondering whether there was any medicine for her state of mind! Unable to distinguish night from day, she would fear, "Is it possible that Rāma has stopped searching for me thinking that the Rākshasās have eaten me up long ago? Rāma probably felt it proper to exhibit the traditional patience of his Solar race and allow his anger to cool off. I do not know what to think? Have the mothers of Bharata and Rāma taken him back to Ayōdhya? I know that my husband will not return without completing the fourteen years in the forest. Does that mean something has happened to him?" *Seeta suffered from an intensity of grief which none in the world had*

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experienced. She brought to her mind Khara and others, who, after obtaining boons, fought with Rāma. She was in despair, as if she saw before her another such battle!

Seeta was constantly thinking of past events. She withered, reminiscing how leonine Rāma's face became thrice brighter when Kaikeyi told him, "This huge country of Kōsala has now been made over to your younger brother." *Seeta thought of Rāma's blooming red lotus face which did not change (as if it was a portrait) — neither when Dasaratha asked him to rule the country nor when Kaikeyi bade him give up the kingdom and go to the forest.* There was a time when Seeta had been anxious whether Rāma could bend the bow of Siva. *Remembering Rāma's robust shoulders that broke Siva's mighty bow, she became lean.* She pined away thinking of the greatness of Rāma's bow which had annihilated fourteen thousand Rākshasās along with Khara and Dooshana who had tormented Devendra. *Seeta thought of the incident when Guhan had helped all of them to cross the deep Ganga and how Rāma had told Guhan, "You are my younger brother and Seeta is your sister-in-law."* She brought back to her mind, how, during her wedding, her father had taken her hands and put them into the hands of Rāma, how he had taken hold of her left hand in his right and had gone through the other rituals of the wedding ceremony and how Rāma had placed her faultless foot on a granite stone and had completed the Védic rituals. She was full of sorrow thinking of Rāma's grief at Bharata's refusal to adorn himself with the golden crown offered to him. Another scene, when Rāma had smiled at the greed of Sage Tirisadan who was not satisfied with receiving a herd of cows, brought tears to her eyes. This incident occurred when Rāma was on his way to the forest, giving up his kingdom. She recalled how Rāma had taken away the bow and also the strength of the penance of Parasurāma who had been consistently bathing in the blood of twenty-one generations of kings. *Seeta extolled Rāma silently, thinking of another incident, when Devendra's son approached her in the form of a crow to satisfy his lust and how Rāma used the sacred dharbai grass as an arrow and destroyed one of his eyes.* She thought of Rāma's prowess in destroying Virādha and redeeming him from a curse. With her senses and life ebbing, Seeta suffered intensely thinking of the past events.

Except for a Rākshasi called Tirisadai, all the Rākshasis who were guarding Seeta were sunk in deep sleep. Looking at Tirisadai, Seeta told her, "You are an honest and good friend of mine. Please listen to what I am going to say. I find that my eye,

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eyebrow and forehead are not twitching on the right side*; instead, they are all twitching on the left side. I do not know what good lies in store for me. Or is this an illusion which will bring forth more miseries because of my sins? The day Rāma arrived at the city of Mithila along with Sage Viswāmitra, my eye, eyebrow and shoulder twitched on the left side. Please think well and tell me the significance of this. I forgot to tell you something else. My eyebrow and other parts twitched on the right side on the day Rāma threw away his kingdom and set out for the forest. The same thing happened on the day venomous Rāvana came to Dandakāranya to commit his treacherous act. Now, when these parts are twitching on the left side, what will happen that might give me hope and make me fearless? Please enlighten me." *Tirisadai replied, "The good omen which you have experienced now will bring you great happiness. You are positively reaching your husband. Also please listen to something! As if to brighten and revive you, I saw a golden-coloured bee softly humming sweet music into your ears and disappearing. This is an indication that a messenger sent by your husband is going to meet you here.* O possessor of vél-like eyes! As you do not sleep, you do not get any dreams. In this blameworthy land, our dreams are faultless!" With words purer than the rays of the sun, Tirisadai continued, "O possessor of impeccable chastity! In my dream, I saw Rāvana applying oil to all his ten heads, covering himself with a red cloth and riding southwards in a chariot driven by countless huge asses and fiends. Rāvana's children with his kith and kin also went with him. None of them returned.

"Please listen to some worse things which appeared in my dream. The sacrificial fire that Rāvana attempted to fan, was extinguished and in its place was seen a heap of red termites! Rāvana's age-old shining palace was hit by a thunderbolt in the early hours of the morning. Female elephants became mad and ran amuck. Drums began emitting sounds without anyone beating them. I heard thunder everywhere without any clouds. All the stars dropped down from the sky. There was light even at night because the sun was cut in two and one half was visible in the sky. Karpaga garlands which the mighty-shouldered heroes wore around their necks had the odour of meat. The city of Lanka, including the wall surrounding it, was in flames. The garden in the city was destroyed. The auspicious temple domes fell down and broke. Darkness surrounded and screened the burning lights. Festoons snapped and fell into bits. The

** The twitching of these parts of the body on the right side is considered a bad omen for a woman.*

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strong, shiny tusks of mighty elephants were found broken. *The sacred water meant for worshipping God was transformed into toddy! Stars came out splitting the moon in the sky.* There was a downpour of blood from the vast clouds in the sky, similar in colour to the blood that oozes out of an ulcer. Weapons like the mace, sword, bow and discus fought by themselves roaring like the sea! The sacred māngalyams of women snapped and fell on their breasts on their own. *The locks of hair on the head of Mandōdhari (Rāvana's wife) suddenly became dishevelled and fell on a burning lamp near by and were burnt, indicating that Rāvana and his race are going to face severe hardship shortly.* I had another dream at this hour of the day. Two strong male lions came with a herd of tigers, living in a big mountain. They entered a forest and fought with a number of rogue elephants and killed many of them. A peacock went along with these two lions to their abode. This is not all. *A holy woman came out of Rāvana's palace carrying a huge bright red lamp which had the brightness of a thousand beautiful lamps, and entered Vibheeshana's palace. It was at that critical moment that you woke me up, and so, that part of the dream is incomplete." Seeta replied, "O beloved mother! May you sleep again so that you can have the rest of the dream!" With folded hands Seeta paid her respects to Tirisadai.*

Hanuman, the warrior-messenger of Rāma, saw the place where Seeta was seated. The Rākshasis who were guarding her woke up and were surprised to find that they had fallen asleep, which boded them no good. They once again surrounded her with their spears, axes, tridents and other weapons. Some fierce-looking Rākshasis had their mouths in their abdomens, while their eyes were on their foreheads. Huge cavernous gaps could be seen between their teeth. A few of the Rākshasis had ten hands and one head; some had twenty heads but only two hands. Their appearance frightened others. They had several mountainous breasts. They had weapons like tridents, swords, discs, elephant-goads and spears, with which they would confront even Lord Siva. With jet-black bodies, the Rākshasis looked venomous. Some of them had faces that resembled elephants, horses, tigers, bears, lions, yālis, dogs and demons. Some had faces on their backs, while a few others had three eyes. Smoke emanated from all their mouths. Though they were females, each one of them was like a Yama. *Such grotesque Rākshasis woke up from their sleep and stood around Seeta.*

While Seeta was wearily and silently looking at the fierce Rākshasis, Hanuman got up and sat on the branch of a tall tree. He wondered why so many Rākshasis with spear-like weapons in their hands were standing close to each other. He looked

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intently inside the circle formed by them and saw incomparable exquisite Seeta (created solely for the handsome, strong Rāma) amidst the dark Rākshasis, shining like lightning that has come out of a mass of dark clouds. Hanuman concluded, "This woman who is like a tender creeper in the midst of a crowd of despicable Rākshasis, must be Seeta. She is like a swan in the pond of tears that have come from her ocean-like eyes." Hanuman was happy and thought, *"Dharma has not been destroyed, nor am I going to die. I have found the Goddess whom I have been trying to find. It is Seeta herself."* Hanuman sang and danced hither and thither intoxicated by the sweet honey of ecstasy. He said to himself happily, "The features of this woman are not different from what Rāma had described. How could this deceitful Rāvana hide Seeta who is Rāma's life and soul? Rāvana's action of imprisoning Seeta will only result in the destruction of his life by Rāma.

"There is no doubt that Rāma is Mahāvishnu come out of the serpent bed and Seeta is Mahālaxmi seated in the lotus. Though Seeta at present resembles a gem which lacks lustre and looks like the moon which has lost its brightness in the presence of the rays of the sun, and her hair is covered with dust, the strength of Seeta's chastity and her will to protect herself are evident. Will dharma ever be destroyed? I do not know whether I should extol the handsome shoulders of Rāma, or the greatness of the mind of Seeta (a jewel among women), or the dynasty of the charitable King Janaka! Neither the celestials, nor the divine sages have erred. Dharma, too, will not die! Hereafter, what is there that is impossible for my Rāma? My loyalty to him has also been proved flawless. Even if there was the slightest blemish in the chastity of Seeta, Rāma's raging sea of anger would have destroyed all the worlds. Fortunately nothing like that has happened. Therefore, all the worlds will be everlasting. Where do we find harsh penance undertaken (through fasting and controlling the five senses) by noble women of good heritage? In comparison with them, those who have only penance to their credit are nowhere. Womanhood and modesty have done penance and attained greatness as a result of the birth ofSeeta. It is indeed a pity that Rāma has not done penance to see with his lotus eyes, the penance done by Seeta! While the Rākshasis exhibit unjust anger, solitary Seeta has none to save her from them. *Loneliness, womanhood and penance are her only friends. Let women be benefited by all the greatness that flows from this noble dharma!* What is it that has protected Seeta? Is it dharma, or the virtuous deeds of Janaka, or her chastity? Where can we see a thing like this? Who can explain all this to me, a simple creature? Even the Devas do the bidding of Rāvana,

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day and night. Such is his prosperity. In a place like this where the cruelty of Rākshasās has resulted in the imprisonment of Seeta, would anyone else have succeeded in preserving her chastity? Can sin really defeat dharma?" With such thoughts, Hanuman was seated on a beautiful big tree full of leaves when Rāvana entered the Asōka grove replete with flowers.

4. RĀVANA CHASTISED

With his twenty shoulders shining with diamonds and rubies and resembling several mighty mountains in one place, with his ten crowns shining like the rising sun and converting night into day, Rāvana came to the Asōka grove. He was followed by Oorvasi (carrying the sword), Menaka (carrying betel leaves and nuts), Tilottamai (carrying the footwear), and other celestial women. The broken tusks of the eight regional elephants had left scars on his chest. With the fragrance of a flower garland and the scent of a paste of camphor and sandalwood on his bosom, Rāvana arrived. Beautiful women in eight rows held lamps fed with fragrant ghee. They wore exquisite white dresses bespangled with gems that emitted a bright light which swallowed darkness. These women followed Rāvana like a flock of white swans. Devendra and other celestial lords closed their eyes and held their breath, fearing where the anger and disappointment of Rāvana, who had risen from his sleep, would lead him ultimately. They could not surmise whether his anger would take him to the moon-faced, Arundati-like Seeta at the Asōka grove, or to some other place.

The milk-white silk upper cloth worn by Rāvana looked like the white spring water coming out of a huge blue mountain. The white jewels embedded in the golden necklaces he wore, flashed like the rays of the morning sun. The sacred thread that adorned his chest shone like a streak of lightning that came out of dark clouds. The diamonds in the ornaments adorning his twenty shoulders, appeared to mock at the stars and the planets. His bright golden anklets spread dazzling light on the ground on which he walked. The bright smiles he gave to each of his relatives whom he met on the way, made their faces bloom even on that night. The golden colour of Rāvana's apparel made a contrast with the dark colour of his body and could be compared to the morning sunlight in the middle of a dark mountain. The nine different gems embedded in the rings adorning the fingers of his twenty hands shone like the beautiful karpaga garden. The white pearls on his chest were like stars stuck on the Meru during pralaya. The ten crowns on his ten heads shone like the twelve suns (sans two) rising from the

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Udayagiri. As Rāvana was about to enter the Asōka grove with his majestic strides, the elephants which had lost their tusks while fighting with him earlier, trembled like the mighty elephant that had nervously touched the feet of the ferocious Lord Narasimha who had shattered Hiranyan's boons! Like a huge mountain surrounded by a herd of peacocks, Rāvana, accompanied by sharp-eyed damsels, Vidyādhara, celestial and Nāga women, and other beauties with kunkumam-smeared breasts, red lips and voices sweeter than that of the nightingale, entered the grove. With flutes, which had artificial holes outside and natural holes inside, giving spontaneous music in tune with the singing of young women, Rāvana arrived. The sweet music played on the yāzh by kinnaras to the accompaniment of drums (which made even the serpents bring forth nectar from their fangs) spread throughout the world and reached the sky!

A group of charming women with fine golden jewels, possessing lovely features, looking like a herd of deer, held white silken fans and welcome-bowls in their hands, to receive Rāvana at the junction of four roads abounding in floral fragrance. These women accompanied him to the Asōka grove like peacocks dancing for joy on sighting a dark cloud. A number of celestial women danced very close to Rāvana. They also played on the yāzh in a classical style and sang with the sweetness of cane-juice. Manmatha's sharp arrows had pierced the chest of Rāvana creating wounds. The cool rays of the moon entered these wounds and aggravated his agony. *'Thenral' the tender southern breeze brought along with it tiny droplets of nectar from flowers, which punctured his body like drops of molten copper, heightening the misery of one who was already suffering from lust.* The white chowries used for fanning him looked like the white waves of the ocean of milk spread over a black mountain, while the royal white umbrella above him appeared like the perfect moon that arose from the sea. Every time Rāvana placed his foot on the ground, the city of Lanka which was on the Trikoota mountain was pressed downwards, the waves of the sea crossed their natural bounds and overflowed in all directions, and the serpent Ādisesha was destabilised. Noble Mother Earth who possessed the ocean as her garment, cried aloud owing to the pressure on her back, as Rāvana walked into the Asōka grove with his heavy steps. Rāvana was accompanied by Rākshasis twice as strong as Tātakai. With their huge hands they could lift mighty mountains. They wielded ferocious weapons like the trident, axe, steel pole, shining sword, spear and bow. Even though Rāvana was aware of the place where Seeta had been hidden, he lost his way because of his lust. Like a multi-hooded serpent going about in search of the brilliant jewel it had

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lost, Rāvana entered the Asōka grove, looking for Seeta, breathing out scalding air and burning its beautiful trees!

Hanuman saw Rāvana's arrival and thought, "Let me watch the deceitful actions of Rāvana and their result." Uttering the name of Rāma, Hanuman hid himself. The celestial women and others who accompanied Rāvana withdrew, while he, all alone, approached the noble Seeta who was a beacon for all women. *Seeta who saw him, became frightened like a female deer about to be eaten by an angry tiger with stripes outside and strength inside emitting smoke from its eyes.* Hanuman saw with his impeccable eyes Seeta who shivered with abhorrence, as well as Rāvana who had lost control of his life due to his lust. *Hanuman whose fame would grow in successive yugas, sincerely prayed, "Long live Jānaki! Long live Rāghava! Long live the four Védas! Long live the sages! Long live dharma!" Rāvana, who went in search of fatal poison mistaking it for nectar, approached Seeta and asked her, "O nightingale with a tormentingly slender waist! When will you show me your kindness?"* Rāvana, the receiver of unlimited strength and grace from Lord Siva, was now shamelessly disgracing himself before Seeta by his demeaning words out of lust for her. Rāvana told Seeta, "O possessor of crimson eyes stretching to the ears! Do you propose to join me only after I am killed by my love for you? The days that are yet to come will be wasted as before. Have you, in my rich kingdom spanning the three worlds, seen any disgrace for me except in my fight with you caused by Manmatha? O damsel possessing long tresses which deserve to be decorated with flowers! You have ridiculed my great riches without realising that the life of your husband Rāma who will go back to Ayōdhya after his stay in the forest, is the life a very ordinary person.

"O young damsel whose lisping words can excel the lisp of a parrot! *Brahma has created you without a waist in the body and without kindness in your heart!* Each day that you spend in this world ensures that you will never get back your youth. The days will slowly and steadily wear you out and finally destroy you. Do you want to drown yourself in misery by wasting your youth which deserves to be enjoyed? Even if there is the slightest sorrow in the mind that rests inside your depressed face, I shall lose my life. I do not care if I die. I am more concerned about you. Is there anyone who can match your beauty other than I, or anyone who has my culture and stature, or who has the depth of love that I have for you? You have all the excellent qualities like femininity, extraordinary beauty and a firm mind. But where have the qualities of kindness and charity gone? Have they all died in the house of Janaka? My dear parrot,

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even after hearing Rāma's wail as he lay dying, do you wait to see him, believing that he is still alive? Do not spurn the opportunity offered by providence to lead a happy life! Instead of coming to me and giving me life, if you become the cause of my death by keeping yourself away, will you not be responsible for the destruction of my wealth? Do you want to seek such ignominy? O beauty, realise that you have before you the lord of the three worlds who can command celestial women to bow with folded hands at your crimson feet. You have rejected all that. Can there be a more foolish woman than you? Though I have vanquished the three worlds, I stand defeated by you. Please accept my prostration and bless me." *Not realising the blemish that would fall on him, Rāvana fell at Seeta's feet, with hands folded above his head.*

Even before Rāvana's words (which were like molten lead) entered Seeta's ears, they got burnt. She became furious with blood coming out of her eyes. Not caring that Rāvana might kill her, Seeta addressed him with harsh words, never used by a soft-spoken woman. She said, "You piece of rust! The disgusting words you have uttered should not have been spoken to a woman wedded to the righteous path of a householder's life. You must know that I have a heart as strong as stone. *In this world, is there anything superior to the power of chastity?* Listen carefully to what I intend telling you. Are you not aware that Rāma's arrow can pierce even the Meru or tear the sky and go beyond and annihilate the fourteen worlds if only he decides to do so? Knowing this, do you wish to have your ten heads shattered? *Only because you were afraid of Rāma did you create an illusive deer, wait for him to follow it, and come deceitfully in the garb of an ascetic.* You did not dare face Rāma who is like deadly poison to your Rākshasa clan! If you want to be saved, take me to Rāma and leave me there. *Why do you not realise that your ten heads and twenty shoulders are ideally suited for the sport of Rāma, who is a master in the art of archery?* Can you ever vanquish him in a fight? Defeated by Jatāyu, you fell on the earth while carrying me away. Only with the help of the sword given to you by Lord Siva did you kill him. Otherwise you would have been killed that same day by Jatāyu. All the boons and the long life that you obtained as a result of your penance were meant only to protect yourself from Yama, but not from Rāma's arrow.

"Realise that the sword of Lord Siva, the long life you have secured for yourself, and the strength of the boons that you have received from Lord Brahma, will all be destroyed the moment Rāma dispatches his arrow at you. *Can darkness survive light?* It is indeed a surprise that you did not hear the thunderous sound when my husband broke the

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Meru-like bow of Lord Siva who had defeated you by pressing Mount Kailas (when you lifted it) with His mere toe. *You boast about your heroic deeds, about moving the Meru and defeating the eight elephants protecting the eight directions; then why did you not have the courage to face Lakshmana while he was protecting me with his bow? Not content with this shame, you prostrate yourself at the feet of women.* The day my husband discovers your hiding-place (Lanka), it will be destroyed. Whether Rāma's anger will stop with that, or only after taking away your life, or after killing the whole clan of Rākshasās, I cannot say. I fear for this world which has not done anything wrong! It is going to be destroyed by Rāma's anger roused by your treachery. *The god of dharma is a witness to my fears.* You cruel Rākshasa, you have held persons of this world and the celestial world in terror. You do not seem to have any thought of giving up your sinful path. You are a fool because you believed that my Rāma could be confronted by you as easily as you did the Trinity of Gods. If you think that Rāma and Lakshmana are ordinary mortals, you are mistaken. You are soon going to lose your exceptional wealth and also your life! Do not underestimate the strength of Rāma and Lakshmana just because they are only two. *Remember that God who can cause the dissolution of the whole world during pralaya, is only one.*

"You will realise the truth of all that I have said, only when you actually fight with Rāma and Lakshmana. Even Hiranyākshan, his brother Hiranyan, and other Asuras who gave up dharma kept away from the wives of others! Think for a moment what made you attain the greatness of ruling all the three worlds? Was it because of the sins you committed, or because of the righteous deeds done by you in your earlier days? You obtained from Lord Siva all the wealth that you now enjoy, only by your penance. Your sinful acts will henceforth make you not only lose your wealth but also your kin. Do you not want to get back to the righteous path that brought you so much wealth? Even those who are strong and are never defeated, are as good as dead if they are unkind, or if they forsake dharma. *Only those who have cast away attachment and vanquished the three internal foes (lust, anger and intoxication), can emancipate themselves from the disease of the cycle of birth and death. The great Sage Agastya from whom flowed the sweet Tamil language, and other sages who were in Dandakāranya met Rāma when he entered the forest, and beseeched him with the words, 'We, the sages living here, are not able to perform our yāgas peacefully because we cannot withstand the hardship caused to us by the Rākshasās. Please slay them and help us. We know for certain that they can be destroyed by you'.* I myself heard these words uttered by the sages, and your actions have justified their fears. Do not forget

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that Rāma had heard from them of your strength, your longevity and your strong army. Only after knowing all this, was the nose of your sister, Soorpanakha, cut and the shoulders of Khara, Dooshana and others sliced into bits. You worthless fellow! You are unaware of dharma which you ought to follow! Was it not Kārtaveeryārjuna with a thousand shoulders, who tied your twenty shoulders and imprisoned you after making you vomit blood with a hard blow? It was Parasurāma who severed the diamond-like strong shoulders of Kārtaveeryārjuna. Have you not heard of this Parasurāma losing his strength because of my Rāma? Even a snake which bites can be controlled by the chanting of Mantras. *Is there no one among your ministers who can boldly advise you, with proper reasons, as to what is right and what is wrong? Do you have ministers who only think as you think and destroy you? If so, can anything other than your end come, ultimately?"*

Seeta's words made Rāvana's twenty eyes emit lightning-like fire. His fierce teeth flashed from out of his mouth. His fury was of such magnitude that it overtook even his lust! *There was conflict in his mind between his anger which made him advance towards her with the object of tearing her apart and eating her, and his lust which made him desist from such an act!* It was then that Hanuman thought, "Before this chaste Arundati-like Seeta (the goddess of my Lord, Rāma) is touched by this despicable Rākshasa who has talked to her in this manner, I will trample and destroy him. I will cut the ten heads of Rāvana and throw them into the cold sea. After that, I will effortlessly carry the noble Seeta who is doing penance here, and return to Rāma." With these thoughts, Hanuman restlessly wrung his hands. In the mean time, the fury of Rāvana grew like the mighty pralaya fire. Rāvana's anger, however, was overcome by his growing lust, like fire extinguished by water! He started addressing Seeta once again, "I rose in anger wanting to kill you. All that you said of me is true. I shall tell you the reasons. There is nothing in this world that I cannot accomplish. My victories and defeats are a sport for me. If I had slain Rāma, who is your very life, and brought you here, you would have given up your life; and Yama would have taken away mine. Keeping all this in mind, I took you away deceitfully. Who can stand before me and fight? Dear honey-tongued Seeta! Rāma and Lakshmana who went after the illusive deer will not come here to save you, once they know it was I who abducted you. Even the Devas will retreat. Remember that though my detractors continue to live, I am the only one who rules the three worlds and is served by Devendra. Is there any other reason for this except my prowess?

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"O lisping doll! I shall certainly not kill weak Rāma and Lakshmana who are indulging in wasteful rituals; instead, I shall bring them here and make them serve me. You will then know who I am. O impeccable beauty! A person who is strong and experienced will not easily be angry with ordinary mortals. Even though these two are useless men, I am grateful to them because they have helped me to attain you. Hence I feel that they do not deserve to be killed. But, if you want them to die, I shall finish that task, too. *I can even reach Ayōdhya and drink the life of Bharata and others who are there! Like the pralaya fire I can completely destroy all those who are in Mithila, come back, and take away your life, too."* Rāvana spoke with fury, looked at the shining sword tucked at his waist and gave Seeta a final warning. "As you are unyielding, the day you are going to be killed by me has come nearer, from twelve months to two. Think and act." Threatening Seeta with harsh words, Rāvana called aside the grotesque Rākshasis who were guarding Seeta and told them, "Either by threats or pleasant words or deceitful means, you must win Seeta over for me and inform me of your success; otherwise I will be venom to all of you." Rāvana then left the Asōka grove.

Suddenly several cruel Rākshasis surrounded Seeta who was like the pristine pure moon swallowed and brought out by the serpent Rāhu. The Rākshasis competed with each other in frightening Seeta. Emitting fire from their eyes, they took out their shining weapons like the trident and the spear, and shouted, "Kill this woman, cut her into pieces and eat her." Then they addressed Seeta, "Rāvana is the son of Sage Visravas who is the son of Pulastya the son of Brahma, and is an expert in the thousand branches of Sāma Véda. What wrong has this great and learned Rāvana done except fall in love with you? O treacherous woman, you have abused our king with harsh words, like prodding an ulcer with a stick. Your body will perish as if from a disease. *You have brought destruction by fire upon the families of your parents (the path from which you came) and your husband (the place to which you went).* Your entire dynasty will be annihilated if you do not yield to Rāvana. We have told you everything clearly." *These words did not affect Seeta's steadfastness.* The threats by the Rākshasis, their confidence in the prowess of their king, and the threatening ultimatum given by Rāvana before his departure, made Seeta weep and also made her laugh derisively at her sad state. Tirisadai who was watching everything, told Seeta, "O mother! Now that I have told you the significance of my dream,it is wrong of you to worry." Seeta replied, "You are like my mother. I will not worry hereafter." The Rākshasis who had threatened Seeta earlier, became calm in the mean time. The knowledgeable Tirisadai explained to all the ferocious Rākshasis there, who did not know anything other than their fear of Rāvana, the significance of her dream.

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The words of Tirisadai sobered the Rākshasis. They cast away their anger and stopped their threats.Partially relieved of her sorrow, Seeta got back her life.

5. HANUMAN REVEALS HIMSELF

Hanuman thought, "This is the appropriate time to talk to Seeta." He chanted a few mantrās which quickly put the Rākshasis to such deep sleep that they appeared to be lifeless. Seeta who had been tormented for long, saw the Rākshasis (who had not slept even for a day) suddenly under a spell of sleep. Unable to contain her grief, and with her love for Rāma foremost in her mind, Seeta said, "O powerful fate, will the thunderous sound of Rāma's frightening bow be heard at all? I pine away in solitude, separated from Rāma. Will he come here and save me?" Then she started addressing the moon 'who never seemed to learn anything', the moon's rays, the nocturnal darkness, blaming all of them for tormenting only her and not Rāma, who, she felt, did not appear to think of her at all. Talking to the flowers, Seeta said, "Do you not realise my condition? You have been moving with Rāma in the forests for long. Could you not have told him of my sorrow?" She thought of Lord Nārāyana and declared that she had not given up her life despite crores of her miseries only in the hope that her husband would not fail to come and save her. Calling Rāma aloud, she said, "When you were about to leave Ayōdhya, you were so kind that you asked me to give up the thought of going with you to the forest 'full of trees'. You wanted me to stay at Ayōdhya as you felt you would be returning soon from the forest. Is this how you show that compassion now? How can you allow me to suffer like this, separated from you and tormented by the Rākshasās?" Speaking to her mind and her life, Seeta said, "You two are wandering shamelessly without leaving me! You do not seem to depart till I see Rāma. Are you both going to share the blame I will incur for being alive for so long, even after being away from my husband? *Dasaratha who would never have died, met his end with 'cruel' Rāma going to the expansive forest plunging the seven worlds in sorrow. How can I rest assured that such a Rāma will come here and wipe away my sorrow?"*

Heaving a sigh, Seeta felt that as long as there was life in her, she would continue to be in grief, and that she would be free from it and attain glory only after her death. Suddenly, a few frightful thoughts took possession of her mind. She felt, "It is true that I am alive here bearing my sorrow with the hope of seeing my heroic Rāma. But will noble Rāma touch me, a woman living in the prison of the Rākshasās for several days?

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Even after knowing that Rāvana had sought me, I have chosen to live. Despite his cruel words falling into my ears, I am alive for so long without giving up my life. Where can you find a Rākshasi worse than me? What 'great' life am I leading here without any concern, suffering from shame beyond words? Among all the chaste women who have found a place in ancient stories, who else except me lived so long, separated from her husband? My Rāma must have given me up thinking that it was not proper to take back a woman living in the house of another. Wasting my life purposelessly is not dharma. The moment this great sin of living in another's house occurred, I should have given up my life. What am I living for, even after knowing that none in this world is going to justify the great wrong done by me in continuing to live? Is it with the hope of reaching heaven? *If Rāma and Lakshmana, who no longer have compassion for me want to suffer from the blame of not saving me, let them suffer. I am born in the great and noble dynasty of Janaka. I alone can redeem the damage done to my name.* I made my king go after the illusive deer. I abused and sent my brother-in-law, Lakshmana in the same direction. Later, I have entered the house of vicious Rāvana. Will the world justify my continuing to live? It is immaterial whether Rāma and Lakshamana who will (in their effort to wipe out their shame) fight with the Rākshasās win or lose. They will always remain unscathed. The censure that will affect me will not affect them. Only I will be considered worthless before women who give up their lives when their honour is at stake. How can I live after exposing myself to their criticism that I lived for a number of days in the city of wicked Rāvana?

"Subsequent to destroying the entire Rākshasa clan through his masterly archery and freeing me from prison, if Rāma were to tell me 'You are unfit to return to my house', how can I prove my chastity which I have been guarding all along? Therefore, I will be pursuing the path of dharma only by dying. Fortunately for me, all the Rākshasis are asleep. I cannot think of a more appropriate time to give up my life." Seeta then reached a tree full of flowers and branches. Hanuman saw this and knew her intentions. He became concerned. He said aloud, "I am a messenger sent by the Lord of the Devas," and appeared before the peacock-like Seeta. Prostrating himself before her, Hanuman continued, "Noble lady, I am here at Rāma's command. Though there are innumerable vānaras in this world who are all engaged in the task of searching for you, I have the good fortune of seeing your sacred feet, owing to the good deeds done by me in the past. Steeped in sorrow (due to separation from you), Rāma is unaware of your being here, which could only be because the time for the annihilation of the Rākshasās has not yet arrived. Please do not doubt me. I have an

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object given to me by Rāma and I can also recall a few incidents narrated to me by him. Through them you will know me as easily as you would a gooseberry in an open palm! Please do not think of giving up your life."

Looking at Hanuman with a mixed feeling of anger and compassion, Seeta thought, "He who is standing before me is not a Rākshasa. He must be a sage who has conquered all his passions, or a Deva, because he possesses a tongue that speaks good sense. He appears honest and incapable of misdeeds. I do not care whether he is a Rākshasa, or an immortal, or a monkey! I am not concerned whether he is going to do me good or harm! He has come here and stood before me and uttered the name of my lord and saved the life which I was about to give up. Can anyone render greater help?" With such thoughts Seeta looked intently at Hanuman and told herself, "I have taken to him kindly, because he speaks words which are the outcome of good intentions and not words which a deceitful Rākshasa is capable of . He is shedding tears at my plight; therefore, he deserves to be heard." Seeta asked Hanuman, "O brave one! Who are you?" Hanuman lifted his two hands above his head and told Seeta, "Mother! Rāma, after being separated from you, sought the friendship of one who is the king of the vānaras. His name is Sugreeva. He is the son of Soorya. Sugreeva's elder brother, Vāli, had once held Rāvana tightly with his tail and had moved about jumping in all the eight directions. Vāli had such strong shoulders that, at the request of the celestials, he was able to churn the ocean of milk with the Meru mountain, using the serpent Vāsuki as a rope, till the nectar of immortality was got. This Vāli who had such great strength was slain with a single arrow by your husband, Rāma! Later he handed Vāli's kingdom to his brother, Sugreeva, and accepted his friendship. *Faithful as a dog to Sugreeva, I am one of his ministers. I am also the son of Vāyu who moves in the sky. My name is Hanuman.*

"A huge army of seventy vellams of monkeys who have the strength to lift all the worlds with their hands, who have feet which can cross the oceans and who are taller than even the sky, is waiting to carry out the wishes of your lord Rāma, by merely observing and understanding his facial expression without his having to utter a word. Several vānaras among these are searching for you in all the seven seas, the islands surrounded by them, the celestial world, and the world of the Nāgas! These vānaras have all been allotted a stipulated time within which they should find you. You may recall that as you were being carried away by the wicked Rāvana, you had tied your jewels in a piece of cloth and had dropped the bundle down. It fell near us,

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while we were at the Rishyamukham mountain. After seeing these jewels, Rāma called me and told me a few things and directed me to go southwards. Can his mercy ever fail? That is how I am here! O mother! The day Rāma and Sugreeva became friends, the jewels were shown to Rāma. *I do not have words to make you understand his condition when he saw your jewels. The sole reason why he is still alive is because he saw them. Only the jewels which you cast away that day, have to this day protected your māngalyam*! I will tell you something more. Sugreeva has sent a vānara army of two vellams under the leadership of Angada, Vāli's son. This army has left Kishkinda and has reached the southern sea."

The words of Hanuman greatly thrilled Seeta. Her body which had shrunk with the heat of sorrow, expanded owing to her thrill! Shedding torrential tears, she asked Hanuman to describe to her the nature of Rāma's body. Hanuman replied, "Rāma's sacred body cannot be described through any simile. All the exquisite objects worthy of comparison pale into insignificance before the divine form of Rāma. A measure of it can be had only by describing Rāma in detail." Describing the whole form of Rāma from his sacred foot to his sacred head, Hanuman said, "Great poets have compared Rāma's feet to the red petals of a lotus. I do not agree with these poets, because his feet are not fragile. As for their colour, even the redness of the corals found in the sea would appear black before Rāma's crimson feet. What purpose is served by comparing coral reefs or red karpaga flowers with the shining toes of Rāma? Perhaps, the only colour that can be compared to the colour of his toes, is the colour of the rays of the rising sun. Even the moon is no match for the beautiful nails of the ten toes of Rāma's sacred feet, because there is only one moon and not ten of different sizes in the firmament. Though sparkling diamonds can be offered as similes, I will have to give up the idea, as there is no diamond large enough to compare with the nails of Rāma's toes! Rāma's feet did not touch the ground when they were in Ayōdhya. Later, they suffered in the forest. I can at best describe these sacred feet by comparing them with Trivikrama's feet which measured all the worlds.

"Mother! The legs of Lord Tirumāl can be compared to Rama's legs to some extent! The trunks of powerful elephants are no match for the thighs of Rāma. Nothing in this world except the handsome neck of Garuda, the extoller of dharma and the king of eagles, can be offered as a simile to the magnificent thighs of Rāma. Comparing River Ganga's whirlpool to the exquisite navel depression of Rāma would be inadequate. O Goddess, Rāma's mountainous chest is so wide and elevated that it would put to shame the beautiful Maragata mountain. *Who is more fortunate than Mahālakshmi*

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who resides perennially in the bosom of Rāma as a result of her penance? Rāma's huge hands, mistaken for lotus flowers by bees, can partly be compared to the trunk of the elephant Irāvatam guarding the eastern direction, because I have nothing else to offer for a full comparison. If anyone has a doubt whether the diamond-like strong body of the Asura Hiranyan was ever torn apart, Rāma's nails will dispel it. Unlike the shoulders of Rāma, mountains neither shine nor display strength nor do they have the company of Goddess Lakshmi! They have neither broken Siva's bow, nor have they become famous, nor are there two mountains exactly like one another. Therefore, how can I compare the two mighty shoulders of Rāma to mountains? While even the celestial Conch, Pāncajanyam, is no match for Rāma's neck, how can I foolishly compare his neck with all the conches found in the sea? *If I am to offer a lotus as a simile for the face of Rāma, then what simile can I give for his eyes? Even the white moon waxes and wanes. Will it therefore be proper to compare his face with the moon?* Even if I compare Rāma's lips with the lotus flower, it will be ashamed of the undeserving compliment. Comparing his lips with corals is not just; because corals neither give the bright smile nor the cool and sweet words that Rāma's lips are capable of.

"Whether I should compare Rāma's teeth with pearls, or slivers of the full moon, or a row of white nectar-drops, or sprouts that have sprung from the seeds of dharma, or flowers that have come from the tree of truthfulness, or jasmine buds, I just do not know! The plea made by the shining light emanating from the blue stone as well as the maragata stone, to be accepted as a simile for the shining nose of Rāma, will have to be turned down, because his nose cannot be compared even with a fine chameleon. When Rāma's bow was bent, Khara and other Rākshasas lost their lives to the joy of the Devas, dharma, the sages and the four Védas. As against this arched bow of Rāma, is there anything else in this world that can be compared with his arched eyebrows? Only you have to find that out! *If the moon can stand firmly for long enough in the darkness of night, getting rid of its blemish of a dark spot, its half-moon-like appearance while rising on the eighth day, its constant habit of waxing and waning, its humiliation of being swallowed by Rāhu, its habit of appearing and disappearing each day, then it could compare with the forehead of Rāma!* His plaited hair which has grown enormously, because of his long stay in the forest, has a natural fragrance without the help of any flowers, or the smoke of aquila. It would be unfair to compare these locks of hair with even rain! *Will not the mighty elephant feel hurt if the gait of the bull is used as a simile for the gait of Rāma, a majestic gait seen both at the time when the kingdom of the seven worlds and all the riches voluntarily came to him, as*

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well as when he walked away and lived in the harsh forest after losing the kingdom?" Listening to Hanuman's words, Seeta melted like wax before fire and lost herself.

Hanuman fell on the ground, prostrated himself before Seeta and added, "You who walk like the peacock and the swan! There are a few important events which Rāma has asked me to convey to you. Please listen to them. Rāma told me, 'While leaving for the forest, I told Seeta that it would be difficult for her to walk through the forest. I wanted her to stay at Ayōdhya looking after my mothers as I would be returning soon from the forest. Tell her, how forlorn and unhappy she was at that and how she angrily stood by my side clad in bark. Under the command of Emperor Dasaratha, I was first assigned his great kingdom. *Later, when I lost this kingdom and was proceeding to the forest, Seeta who had accompanied me, asked me where the forest was, even before we had left the gate of the city fort!* Please tell her of this incident. She had asked my charioteer Sumantira to convey to Ayōdhya that she was consoled by my words of comfort. Remind Seeta how in a child-like manner, she told Sumantira, 'Please ask Urmila to take care of the parrots and other pets which I have reared!' There is no need to tell her more. Show her this ring which bears my name'. With these words, Rāma gave me this ring." Hanuman showed Seeta an exceptional ring. *Seeing it, whether Seeta was like one who reaped the benefits of a virtuous act done suddenly, or was like one who found a valuable article considered lost, or was like a dead body coming back to life, it was hard to say! She was as happy as a serpent recovering the ruby it had lost! She was like a sterile woman bearing a child! She was like one retrieving her cherished wealth or like a blind person getting back her eyesight!*

Taking the ring from Hanuman, Seeta kept it on her bosom and then on her head and then pressed it to her eyes. Her shoulders swelled, her mind became cool and she became lean. Yearning for Rāma, she sighed. Her excitement was beyond description. She wiped her tears of joy. She went on looking at the ring and wanted to say a number of things to it; but words did not come and she gulped back her feelings. The brightness of the ring turned Seeta's lightning colour into a golden one; because Rāma's ring had the extraordinary quality of imparting a golden hue to any object that came into contact with it. *This beautiful ring was to Seeta like nectar to one who was famished; it was like a beloved guest to one who had established a home; it was like a life-giving medicine to one who was about to die. May Rāma's ring live for ever!* With tears of joy falling on her bosom, Seeta told Hanuman, "O great one! You have given me life. Coming as a messenger from Rāma (who brought forth Brahma), you have

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brought life to me through your excellent qualities. *You are like God, playing the dual role of my mother and father. You have given me happiness in this life as well as the next. Is there anything I can do in return for what you have done for me?* You have also brought me a good name. You who possess strong shoulders! You who wiped away my tears! If it is true that my chastity is absolutely blemishless, may you live forever even after the fourteen worlds are destroyed and several yugas have passed. Please tell me where Rāma and Lakshmana are. Where did Rāma meet you? Through whom did he learn the news of my being carried away?"

Narrating the events, Hanuman said, "The dark deceitful Mārica in the form of a deer under orders from Rāvana stood before you. Rāma went after this deer you had sought. The moment it was struck by his arrow, the deer changed into its real form, that of Mārica, and fell down wailing aloud in Rāma's voice to deceive you. Rāma who prayed, 'Let Lakshmana not think this is my voice', twanged his bow. Still, fearing that the illusory voice of Mārica was raised with a motive, Rāma hurried back, but saw Lakshmana coming with a bow in his hand. Looking at Lakshmana's face, Rāma understood everything. After listening to Lakshmana's words, Rāma reached the hermitage. He fell down almost lifeless when he found that your sacred form was not there. What more was needed for his misery? *My Lord, Rāma, is like one who is living an unreal life after you, his real life, departed. He is not yet destroyed because you are still in his heart. How can he die when his life is still here?* Rāma who suffered acutely, after going through thick forests and difficult mountains, saw Jatāyu. Rāma's anger almost engulfed the whole place with fire, as wounded Jatāyu explained to him the deceitful manner in which Rāvana had carried you away. When Rāma wanted to destroy the whole world, Jatāyu pacified him, saying, 'You must not destroy those who have not done any harm, just because one despicable being harmed you'. Rāma became calm and requested Jatāyu to tell him where Rāvana lived and the direction in which you were carried away. Jatāyu died and attained everlasting fame before he was able to give the details. *Immersed in sorrow, Rāma and Lakshmana performed the obsequies of the heroic Jatāyu (who was like their father) in such a manner that even the Devas were amazed!* Deciding to find out this treacherous Rāvana, the brothers crossed forests and lofty mountains.

"The two who could not find you, searched hard everywhere for you. The copious tears that flowed from their red eyes converted the long route they trekked into a mire. Rāma melted like a burning candle. He started losing his senses. He began talking

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incoherently with the fury of Lord Siva. Looking at the Gōdāvari River, he would desperately wail and say, 'Is it not a fact that when the sun rose, my Seeta looking like the coral-reef used to bathe in your cool water? Therefore find her and hand her over to me. Otherwise I will scorch you with my arrow'. Rāma would address the mountains and say, 'Seeta must be somewhere inside you. If you do not show her to me, this single arrow is enough to destroy all the mountains and burn them to ashes'. He would angrily talk to the deer in the forest, 'If Mārica had not taken the form of a golden deer and deceived me, my deer-like Seeta would not have left me. I shall therefore not only destroy all of you with this fatal arrow, but I shall also ensure that not a single deer is left in the world'. Rāma who lost his natural poise, gave such outlets to his grief. Only after listening to the healing words of Lakshmana did Rāma get back his life. Rāma and Lakshmana reached the Rishyamukha mountain where Sugreeva was living. The lotus-eyed Rāma made friends with Sugreeva, making the Devas happy. Rāma who transcends the Védas, told us in detail about his deep anguish and how he had come to the mountain in search of you. We showed him your jewels and he lost consciousness as soon as he saw them. Only after our words of comfort steadily fell into his ears, did he regain consciousness. Beyond the Rishyamukha mountain, there is another mountain known as Kishkinda inhabited by mighty Vāli. Rāma killed this Vāli with a single arrow and handed over his kingdom to friendly Sugreeva asking him to come with his army after the rainy season was over. For four months Rāma stayed in the Rishyamukha mountain itself. Sugreeva's army arrived after that period. I was sent southwards in search of you after others were dispatched in all the other directions. That is how I stand before you." With these words, compassionate Hanuman (who could know the past, present and the future) concluded his narration.

Thinking of the sufferings undergone by Rāma, Seeta became sad. She felt that even her bones would melt. At the same time, Seeta acquired the strength to withstand both sorrow and happiness. Shedding copious tears, she asked Hanuman, "How was it possible for you to cross the immeasurable waves of the ocean?" Hanuman replied, *"Just as knowledgeable sages are able to cross the interminable sea of illusion by worshipping your husband, I was able to cross this black sea, with the help of Vāyu."* Seeta told Hanuman, "You have crossed the sea with a body that may be considered small? Was this feat possible because of the strength you acquired through your penance or with the help of supernatural siddhas? Do enlighten me." Hanuman, who stood with folded hands, decided to show his huge form to Seeta. With his broad shoulders, he instantly grew so tall that none could reach him. Fearing that he would

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hit the sky, Hanuman bent his head down and stood before Seeta. His huge form made one wonder whether the greatness achieved through virtuous deeds rested with the five fierce elements, or with him. The stars that were stuck around the hair of golden Hanuman's head looked like the glow-worms seen in the thick forest trees on the Meru. *Hanuman grew beyond the reach of one's sight and even comprehension. The two bright ear-rings dangling from his two ears in the sky, competed with the sun and the moon. Even Lord Mahāvishnu who had once measured all the worlds with His sacred feet, looked carefully at Hanuman who could not be dismissed as an ordinary monkey, and felt, "Greatness need not be in one place alone!"*

All the living objects in all the eight directions in the world saw Hanuman! At the same time, he, with his lotus eyes, saw all the immortal beings in the celestial world. Sea water flowed inside Lanka owing to the pressure brought on the earth by the two mighty feet of Hanuman whose full view could not be had by chaste Seeta. She became certain that all the Rākshasās would soon die. She was happy, as if she had embraced the shoulders of Rāma. She told Hanuman, "No one living in this world is capable of seeing your huge form. I am frightened. Please assume your original form." Responding to her request, Hanuman shrank himself to his normal size. She told him, "Even if you uproot the mountains from the world, or pulverize the world at once, or catch the serpent, Ādisesha, with one hand, your capabilities will not be displayed in full. The fact that you had to cross only one sea to reach Lanka instead of having to cross seven seas, is an insult to your prowess. For Rāma, you have become the only one to bring everlasting fame transcending several yugās. *You have such a form, such knowledge, such ability to control the five senses, such clarity of mind and such a judicial temperament, that Lord Brahma and others appear ordinary before you.* Seeing the large number of ferocious and strong Rākshasās, I was afraid how Rāma would defeat them merely with the help of Lakshmana. I am rid of that fear after seeing you. When you are there to help my Rāma, I know what will happen to the Rākshasās. Now, even if I die, it does not matter, because I shall have caused the total destruction of the Rākshasās who have troubled me so much. I already feel as if I have been released from my prison and attained the sacred feet of Rāma. Instead of shame, I have fame in store for me."

Prostrating himself at Seeta's sacred feet, the lofty Hanuman said, "O great one comparable to Arundati! Please know that there are several vānara leaders on the beaches and sands waiting to carry out the commands of Rāma. I have come here as an ordinary servant obeying their orders. Rāma's huge vānara army, for which this sea

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is like a pond, is seventy vellams strong. The sea would be inadequate, if each of the vānaras drank but a handful. This Lanka protected by these deceitful Rākshasās, remains undestroyed because the vānaras do not know its whereabouts. Now that Lanka has been found, will it last? Leaders like Sugreeva, Angada, Vasanta, Duminda, Kulanda, Neelan, Idaban, Kavayan, Kavayākkan, Vinatan, Duvindan, Nalan, Tamban, Dooman, Dadhimukhan, Satavali, *are all there to help Rāma like the unfailing arrows in his hand.* These vānara leaders are capable of uprooting this world as well as the one above. To count the number of vānaras serving under these leaders is impossible."

6. CHOODĀMANI

Incomparable Hanuman thought, "Seeta, the very life of Rāma, is suffering from great hardship here. What I ought to do now is to take her to Rāma." He told Seeta, "Please do not be angry at my words! If you get killed by Rāvana, there is no use of defeating him later or chiding him now. I shall therefore carry you forthwith and go to Rāma. You may rest and sleep on my shouders, and I shall jump in a moment, straight to the mountain where Rāma is staying. If the Rākshasās obstruct me, I shall destroy all of them. I know that I cannot be killed by anyone. After seeing your condition here, how can I return empty-handed? Mother! Even if you ask me to take the whole of this Lanka along with you, I shall certainly do it. I will tear away Lanka and hold it in one hand, and with the other, I will pulverise the Rākshasās who dare to stop me. Later, I shall go and fall at the sacred feet of Rāma and Lakshmana. This is not a difficult task for me. On the other hand, imagine what will happen to my loyalty to Rāma, if I were to go and tell him, 'Seeta who is your life-giving medicine is kept in prison by the deceitful Rākshasās. She is pining there without any hope of being freed', and then describe to him the strength of our enemies. Worse than that would be to tell him, 'I saw Seeta; but out of my anxiety to save my own life, I have not brought her to you!' Mother! If you order me to set fire to the whole of Lanka surrounded by walls and then ask me to destroy all the Rākshasās including Rāvana, I shall complete the task right now. Rāma will then be united with you and will be free from sorrow. As a result of the good deeds done by me, let me have a chance to carry out my suggestion. *Please climb on my shoulders and get rid of your sorrow by reaching Rāma.*" With these words, Hanuman prostrated himself at Seeta's sacred feet.

Seeta told Hanuman who looked like a calf before the cow, "I know that it is well within your capacity to do all that you have said. However, even though I am not very knowledgeable, my womanhood, coupled with a little power of thinking, makes

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me feel that it is impossible to accept your offer. Rākshasās will surround you above the middle of the ocean when you are in the process of carrying me. You will find it difficult to fight with those treacherous Rākshasās who will be shooting arrows at you. Unable to protect me, you will become helpless. There is also another reason why I cannot accept your offer. As a result of your action, the invincible and powerful bow of Rāma will suffer from dishonour. There is yet another reason for turning down your request. Is it proper to duplicate the treachery committed by the despicable cur who brought me here? How could you, too, think of such a deceitful act? I shall attain satisfaction only when the eyes of Rāvana which have looked at my body with lust, are pecked and eaten by crows after he is killed in the battlefield by the powerful arrows of my husband in the very presence of all the Devas. *Only when Rāma and Lakshmana with their strung bows destroy all the Rākshasās, only after the shameless Rākshasis suffer from the ignominy of Soorpanakha whose nose was severed, and only after these Rākshasis lose their māngalyams will I consider myself vindicated.* If Lanka on the Trikoota mountain is not made into a mountain of Rākshasa bones, how can my good lineage, my character and my unimpeachable chastity be demonstrated? One word uttered by me would have been sufficient not only to burn Lanka inhabited by the Rākshasās who have taken to torturing others as a profession, but also all the worlds. *I discarded the thought because it would bring discredit to the prowess of noble Rāma's archery.*

"O truthful Hanuman, there is one more reason why you should not carry me. Even though you have controlled your five senses, the world would still consider you a male. Would it be proper for me to touch you or any male, other than Rāma? Would that lowly Rāvana have lived so long if he had touched me? *Only because Rāvana realised that he would die the moment he touched me, did he dig the earth with his mighty hands and take me away along with the hermitage!* Lord Brahma had once cursed Rāvana, 'If you touch any woman against her wish, all your heads will be smashed'. It is only this curse that protected my life. Tirisadai, the daughter of noble and truthful Vibheeshana, out of her kindness to me had told me of this curse to dispel my fears. Because of this curse, I have been able to live so long without giving up dharma, constantly bearing in mind the prowess of Rāma, and hoping to prove to the world the sanctity of my chastity. *Rāvana brought the earth along with the hermitage and kept it here. See with your eyes which can discern truth, this hut built by Lakshmana.* I do not leave this place even for a moment. I may occasionally enter this pool with lotus flowers, containing water resembling the complexion of Rāma, only to protect my sagging life. Therefore, taking me with you is not

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right. *All that you have to do now is, go straight to the respository of the Védas, my husband Rāma."*

Getting rid of his misgivings and sorrow, Hanuman extolled Seeta and felt, "The penance of Seeta, mighty Rāma's life partner, is great indeed." He told her, "The world which has become dark because of Rāvana, will soon become bright. Till then do not give up your life. Please tell me what message I should convey to Rāma." Hanuman thereafter, fell at Seeta's sacred feet. *Seeta replied, "Tell Rāma that I shall be alive for one more month in this Lanka. If, within that period, he does not come and save me, I shall die. Keep in mind that I swear this in the name of Rāma. Make a plea to him that even if I am not a deserving wife, or even if he does not possess the kindness to save a helpless woman whom he considers not related to him, at least he has to prove his valour.* Convey to the laudable Lakshmana that, as one who had been protecting me (due to the grace of Rāma) in Pancavati, it is his responsibility to release me from my prison. The vow I have undertaken will be over within a month. If Rāma does not come here before that, he must be prepared to perform my last rites on the banks of the Ganga. Tell Rāma, the apostle of dharma, that the dying Seeta bows before her three mothers-in-law. *If Rāma lacks compassion for me and fails to convey this to them, at least you do not forget to do so.* Whisper secretly into the ears of Rāma, the boon that he gave me at the time of our wedding in Mithila when he held my hand and said, 'During this birth of mine in this world, I shall not touch, even with my mind, another woman'. *Tell Rāma that even if I lose my life in this Lanka without being saved by him, I bow to him to bless me to be born again to touch his sacred body alone.* What is the use of my telling you all this? I am not anyhow going to be blessed with the good fortune of watching from close quarters the magnificent sight of Rāma riding a decorated elephant and ruling the kingdom sitting on a splendid throne. I shall quietly suffer my fate. How can Rāma think of just one person and come here to relieve her of her misery? He will only go to Ayōdhya to remove the sufferings of the people of Kōsala and relieve the sorrow of his mother and the grief of his brother, Bharata. Please convey my salutations to my mother and father and ask the king of the vānaras to protect Rāma and make him the king of eternal Ayōdhya."

Hanuman heard the words of Seeta and told her, "Gracious lady! You have not yet given up your grief." He then spoke sweet words of reasoning to convince Seeta. He said, "Are you presuming that after you die in Lanka, Rāma will retain his life and go back to Ayōdhya and get crowned? Will Rāvana who imprisoned you, live? Will Rāma

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and Lakshmana who had once said they would destroy the Rākshasās, go back on their word? Do you mean to say that instead of killing the Rākshasās, we would protect our lives and go to Rāma? And thereafter he would return to Ayōdhya preserving his bow and arrows in an unused condition? Who can be considered 'greater' than us (vānaras) if we fear getting caught in the unfathomable sea of sorrow and not give back Seeta to that noble Rāma who conferred on us the prosperous kingdom of Kishkinda? For Rāma, who had assured the sages at Dandakāranya that he would not return to his country without offering as food for the devils, the bowels of the Rākshasās who had harassed them, is it impossible to defeat the Rākshasās and save you? *If we go back to Ayōdhya without redeeming you from this prison, will the people at large, the poets and the righteous ones over there, accept our words?* If we return home consoling ourselves that the chaste and truthful Seeta died before she was touched by the Rākshasās who are untouched by dharma, will not our 'glory' be exposed? Do you not realise that once you give up your life in sorrow, even if Rāma fights with his unfailing arrows and destroys the seven worlds, he will never be free from the blemish he would have earned for himself?

"O incarnation of Mahālakshmi, please do realise that even before Rāvana had imprisoned you, Rāma had decided to kill all the Rākshasās in the three worlds. The thought that Rāma would exhibit calmness, after your incarceration here, is shocking. Rāma's anger, which is not aroused without a proper reason, will not stop just by killing all these strong Rākshasās. *His anger will be appeased only after you are freed. If you are not redeemed alive from your prison, will not the terrestrial and celestial worlds get totally destroyed?* Will not Rāma's powerful arrows annihilate the fourteen worlds, like the devastating fire during pralaya? When such a thing happens, to which place will the Rākshasās escape? Will you not welcome the encomiums showered by the world on Rāma for killing the enemies of the Devas, stopping evil forces from reappearing, protecting all good people and making virtue live for ever? *If, as a result of your suffering for a few days, you become the cause for the upholding of dharma and the bringing of happiness to all the people in the world, is it not good?* Are you not eager to see the sight of fiends bathing in a river of Rākshasa blood, and the Devas showing themselves after getting rid of their fear? You will see blood flowing from wounded Rākshasās (like the thunderous waves of the seven seas during pralaya), as a result of their bodies being split by Rāma's shining and deadly arrows. You will shortly see a huge mountain (which even Vāli could not have crossed) of the māngalyams of Rākshasis who, after losing their husbands, will be weeping and

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beating their huge bellies. *You will also watch the sight of tall fiends and countless vultures and other birds, bathing in the sea of blood of these Rākshasās and then washing the blood-stains in the copious tears of weeping Rākshasis.* The auditoriums of Lanka, where the pleasant beat of drums and the music from the yāzh were heard accompanied by the dance of celestial Apsarases, will be full of rows of heroic victorious monkeys playing and jumping for joy. You will see huge seas being filled with the mountainous bodies, dragged into them by the blood flowing copiously from the wounds of the despicable Rākshasās.

"You will see that, you, Jānaki, will be like fire in the midst of the ashes of the Rākshasās. Rāma's arrows will act like a hurricane, fan the fire known as *Seeta* and burn the city of Lanka making it appear like molten gold! Rāma's arrows will make Rāvana (who can successfully attack anyone) fall dead. Rāvana's twenty eyes which looked at your sacred body will be pecked by the sharp beaks of crows, and eaten by them. On an earlier occasion, the elephants protecting the eight directions were routed by Rāvana and put to shame. You will shortly see the severed venomous heads of Rāvana falling at the feet of these elephants. You will see fiends dancing and raising dust with an uproar, happy that they will be fed, owing to Rāma's arrows raining on Lanka which was so far full of flags wiping the sweat of the blue sky above. The red river of blood from the black Rākshasās, will fill the saltish sea and flow into the city. Yama, who is not satiated even during the destruction of the universe, will be consuming the Rākshasa lives excessively and vomiting them out of disgust. You will see a number of monkeys holding each other's tails, forming a huge circle, (like a garland) and playing in fragrant lakes where the Rākshasās used to bathe along with celestial damsels. Rāma's divine arrows will kill the Rākshasās in Lanka and then go on to kill the Rākshasās in all the three worlds, annihilating them."

Hanuman added,"You do not have to suffer for one more month in this prison. I shall immediately go and see Rāma. As soon as my message is delivered to him, he will come here to save you without a moment's delay. Rāma has life only in name. He is so consumed by fire that there is not a single flower, nor a tender creeper, nor a garden left unburnt in the entire forest traversed by him. Rāma's senses have become so benumbed that he can no longer feel the sensation of grief. Even if thunder from the clouds falls on him, or the five-headed serpent strikes his chest, I wonder whether he will get back his consciousness. His five senses have lost their quality to perceive things after his separation from you. The consequent mental agony he undergoes is

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beyond description. Like yoghurt battered by a churning staff, Rāma's life along with his five senses, is being churned in his body. His anguish cannot even be imagined. You are wrong if you think that Rāma will survive after his separation from you. O mother! With the ease of proving the presence of a gooseberry on the palm, I can show you the truth of whatever I have said. You will derive happiness at the fanfare and enthusiasm with which the monkey army will storm the citadel of Lanka, even before the news about you reaches Rāma and the vānara king, Sugreeva. *You will see by tomorrow an army of countless vānaras reaching this city with Rāma sitting on my back, like Lord Mahāvishnu seated on Garuda. Lakshmana will be seen on the shoulders of Angada, like the sun on the Udayagiri.* Please get rid of all your doubts and be relieved of your loneliness. *If Rāma does not save you from this big prison within a month, then let it be understood that the sins of Rāma will transform him into Rāvana; and Rāvana will be transformed into Rāma!"*

Listening to Hanuman, Seeta attained clarity of mind. She became happy and got back her life. Realising that it would be good for her if Hanuman reached Rāma quickly, Seeta told him, "Noble one, may you overcome all the obstacles on your way and go to Rāma at once. There is nothing much to say. I will tell you a few things that happened earlier so that Rāma will know I have been met by you." With sweet words, Seeta said, "Please tell Rāma how he converted a blade of grass into a Brahmāstram and directed it at the crow which tried to pierce my chest with its sharp claws. Chased by the Brahmāstram, the panic-stricken crow reached Brahmaloka. When Brahma was angry with the crow, it tried to go to the abode of Lord Siva, and all the places in the eight directions. This crow which was none other than Jayanta the son of Devendra, was refused entry everywhere. Watching the plight of the crow from the celestial world, the Devas advised it to seek refuge at Rāma's sacred feet. Jayanta became frightened and prostrated himself before the noble and compassionate Rāma. Commanded by him, the Brahmāstram took away only one eye of Jayanta. *Remind Rāma about another incident. I had asked my lord what name I should give my delicate parrot as dear to me as my life. He immediately said, 'name the parrot after Kaikeyi, my noble mother!'"*

Seeta had nothing more to say. She had an exquisite jewel (emitting rays far superior to the rays of the sun), which she had kept tied in a cloth. She took out this jewel known as Choodāmani. Hanuman was stunned on seeing the jewel which seemed to chase away darkness from all the seven worlds. The sparkling light emanating from the Choodāmani frightened even the Rākshasās with fierce eyes, because they

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thought that Soorya had entered the huge city of Lanka, undaunted by Rāvana. The brightness of this jewel opened up the lotus flowers which were depressed all these days without seeing the sun. Even the Sooryakantha stones spat out fire at the sight of this Choodāmani. Seeta showed Hanuman this red jewel which resembled her crimson body and the sacred red feet of Rāma, a jewel which when worn on her soft dark hair, would appear like the sun emerging from dark clouds. Giving the Choodāmani to Hanuman, Seeta said, "You came searching for me and gave me life. O good Hanuman, as a proof of having met me, take this jewel which is like my very eyes and which I had preserved in my garment." Hanuman tied this sacred jewel in his cloth so that it would not get damaged, went round Seeta thrice, prostrated himself before her and shed tears at having to leave her and go. With the blessings of Seeta, Hanuman finally left the place.

7. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ASŌKA GROVE

Hanuman decided to go northwards and assumed his huge form. As he was about to leave, he felt that just conversing with Seeta and leaving the place did not adequately reflect his valour and that he should do something more. He thought, "How can I be considered a worshipper of Rāma, if these Rākshasas who are indulging in their atrocities are not killed by me, if Lanka is not thrown into the sea, and if Seeta is not taken back to the sacred feet of Rāma? Unless I tie the ten heads and twenty shoulders of Rāvana with my long tail and imprison him, what is the purpose of my claiming that Rāma and I have sought each other's help? What is wrong in chasing away the Rākshasa hordes and dragging Mandōdhari, Rāvana's wife, by the hair and imprisoning her in the very presence of the strong Rāvana? The right thing for me to do is to exhibit my strength, torment the Rākshasas and make them run. Let me see how I can engage them in a combat. I shall destroy this garden immediately! As soon as the noise reaches the ears of the Rākshasas, they will become furious and will approach me for a fight. I shall then show my strength and consume their lives. The fierce and strong Rāvana will also come to me for a fight when he finds his Rākshasas killed by me. I shall then demolish his ten heads and happily go back to Rāma."

Hanuman, who was full of such thoughts, grew gigantic in form. His shoulders swelled like the Meru orbited by the sun and the moon. He appeared fierce like the divine Boar*. He started demolishing the trees in the Asōka grove. As a result of his violent kicking, a few trees were torn, a few were totally destroyed, a few were thrown

** One of the ten incarnations of Mahāvishnu when He appeared as the Boar (Varāha).*

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upside down, a few were broken into pieces, a few got burnt and a few others were uprooted. The havoc caused by Hanuman was so great that some of the trees were thrown high up, reaching the very clouds in the sky. Some fell into the ocean, and also into the city of Lanka. The uprooted trees were thrown so far, that they became food for the elephants in eight directions, while a few trees went up and fell into the celestial gardens! The trees that were thrown into the ocean produced such an impact that the waves of the ocean became violent. The trees which Hanuman dashed against the mountains, pulverised them. The white flowers from the trees thrown upwards, dropped down from the sky along with the celestial stars! Several trees uprooted by Hanuman were strewn all over the different worlds in the universe. Some of the mighty trees that were kicked upwards into the sky, dashed against each other while falling down and became a heap of dust. Birds, bees and insects fell into the sea along with the trees and were consumed with glee by the fishes, sharks and whales. After a while, the same creatures were crushed by the trees which fell on them. As a result of countless flowers from the trees falling into the sea, it became fragrant and resembled the lakes used by the celestials for bathing. *The trees and jewel-bedecked platforms that fell into the sea almost created a pathway making Hanuman feel that he could walk instead of having to fly over the sea while returning from Lanka.* The houses of the Rākshasās were smashed by the huge trees (shining like the summer sun) thrown by Hanuman, and resembled mountains struck by thunder. *The trees were thrown upwards so rapidly that they were all seen together as a garden in the sky, as though Hanuman in his fury, had transported the entire Asōka grove into the celestial world.*

Trees full of flowers shining like gems, hurled into the sky by Hanuman, spilled drops of nectar and moved like celestial chariots. Huge trees full of branches fell into the sea, and appeared like massive clouds descending into it. The karpaga trees brought from the celestial region by Rāvana, were sent back to heaven by Hanuman. He destroyed verandahs decorated with gems, smashed mantapams, destroyed the nearby ponds and shining walls, annihilated all exquisite objects and flattened hillocks. Not a tree was spared by him. He felled all the kino trees. The karpaga trees were all crushed along with their flowers. The shanbhagha trees which were packed in a row, were also torn from the earth and thrown far away. Even the mango trees were demolished by him. As a result of the mighty feet of Hanuman trampling the flower gardens of Asōka grove, the sandalwood trees caught fire and got destroyed, auditoriums fell down, and flowery trees were burnt. Leaves, branches, creepers, flowery gates, fragrant foliage, honey, bees and peacocks were all annihilated. *The*

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coral creepers hurled by Hanuman, engulfed the darker mountains, like lightning streaking through the clouds. The golden trees full of branches thrown by Hanuman, shone like the face-plates of the elephants inhabiting the mountains of Lanka. The chirping of birds which came out of the uprooted trees, the thunderous sound from the clashing of the trees that went up and came down, and the roaring of Hanuman, raised such a din that it was heard even beyond this world.

Groups of birds along with their offspring, suffered severe hardship and fell into the sea in the company of several trees with cool bees humming melodius music. The huge trees thrown upwards by Hanuman fell into the pure water of the celestial Ganga which sparkled like Lord Tirumāl. The salty sea was converted into a sea of flowers full of nectar and the bees hummed the musical note known as kāmaram. The sandalwood trees hurled by Hanuman at the houses of the Rākshasās smashed their doors. The fragrant garden trees torn and thrown into the sky appeared like bountiful stars, while the tamarind trees hurled into the sea fell on pearl shells and made them eject their pearls. Several golden-hued trees with branches, thrown into the sky by Hanuman appeared like the nocturnal rainbow, as if to portend the instant slaying of all the Rākshasās by him. Many trees of the Asōka garden, thrown by the great Hanuman, fell on the stables of elephants and galloping horses, dance-arenas and drinking-halls and destroyed all of them along with chariots decorated with flowers. The faultless golden flags torn out and thrown by him, fell in all directions like sliced rays of the sun falling into the cloudy sea. Due to the hurling and breaking of huge trees and hillocks, the shining golden walls of Lanka were brought down, mansions were burnt to ashes, and the whole city was destroyed. *As if afraid of the wrath of Rāvana for silently watching the destruction of the Asōka garden by a monkey, the moon disappeared. But still, during that night, the world was full of light owing to the fine trees of that garden being thrown in all directions by Hanuman.* The animals in the Asōka grove became frightened. Most of the birds fell into the sea, and those that did not, suffered intensely and tried to fly away. While a few birds, unable to fly for long, fell down on the earth, a few others lost their feathers and died. By the furious touch of Hanuman (with his handsome chest looking like the sun) several birds entered heaven along with their nests built in divine trees. *Is it possible to describe the celestial realms to which they would have all gone if Hanuman had shown his grace to them? While all the trees were destroyed by Hanuman, only one tree, the one under which the sorrowful Seeta sat, was not destroyed, like the huge banyan tree under which Lord Mahāvishnu sat during the dissolution of the universe!*

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The sun rose from the eastern sea with such dazzling splendour that it looked as though it had, out of sympathy, taken out another Choodāmani to offer to Seeta who had no jewel with her as she had sent her only jewel to Rāma. Hanuman who was standing alone after destroying the Asōka grove, appeared like Lord Mahāvishnu who had measured all the fourteen worlds with His feet. Standing like the Mandara mountain which had churned the ocean of milk, Hanuman looked like Lord Siva after He had destroyed the entire universe during pralaya. The Rākshasis who woke up from their sleep became angry at what had happened to the Asōka grove. When they looked at the huge form of sacred Hanuman standing like the golden Meru, they became frightened. They went up to Seeta and asked her whether she knew who it was. Seeta told them, *"Only sinners like you know the evil deeds done by sinful Rākshasās. How can good persons like me know your deceitful acts? Even when Lakshmana warned me that the deer that came in front of me was a Rākshasa, I rejected his advice and set my heart on it, taking it to be a genuine one."* The Rākshasis beat their bellies and ran amuck in all directions. In the mean time, Hanuman saw a huge dazzling artificial hillock near by, which put to shame and 'hurt' the 'feelings' of even the Meru. The hillock gave out a milkish white light, brighter than the moon, and swallowed all the darkness. It was created by Brahma as desired by Rāvana. The pillars that propped it up were all made of pearls and red stones. The whole place was so dazzling that it defied description. Hanuman decided to destroy it. Wanting to put Rāvana's prowess (of lifting the Meru) to shame, Hanuman extended his hands, tore out the artificial hillock, and threw it at the city of Lanka. As a result, tall buildings were smashed and sparks of fire fell on the houses, setting fire to all the objects near by. Some of the Rākshasās died out of sheer fright. The six celestials who were guarding the six corners of the Asōka grove became frightened. Hit by the trees hurled by Hanuman, they began to bleed. With their legs crossing one another, they ran to Rāvana with great difficulty, crying loudly.

Standing before wrathful Rāvana, the six celestials said, "We are ashamed to inform you that we have become incapable of guarding the Asōka grove. It is being destroyed (as fast as a cloth catching fire) by a huge monkey possessing mountainous shoulders. The monkey has pulverised the whole garden, smashed the trees with its hands and legs (not leaving even the grass), uprooted the artificial hillock, and hurled it at the city of Lanka. Excepting a small place in the city, everything else is demolished." Rāvana ridiculed the celestials and said, "What a wonder that a mere monkey is able to demolish the Asōka grove and destroy Lanka by hurling the

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artificial hillock at it! The bravery of the Rākshasās is fine indeed! Even fools will not talk the way you have done!" The celestials again told Rāvana, "O king! We have to praise the earth for withstanding the weight of this huge monkey! *To say that this monkey is one among the Trinity of Gods is not adequate. Your majesty! Please do see this monkey right now." Just then Hanuman gave such a mighty roar that it appeared as though the world would split in two and the sea water would flow into the crevice. The sound frightened the Rākshasis so much that all those who were pregnant aborted. Even the elephants supporting the eight directions, ran from their respective positions!*

8. THE SLAYING OF THE KINKARAS

Like the sound of a thunderbolt hitting the cave of a mountain, like the great noise created by the turbulent sea during pralaya, like the sound that was heard when Rāma broke the bow of Lord Siva, the mighty roar of Hanuman entered the twenty ears of Rāvana whose ten heads were decorated with ten crowns. Smiling gently, with a tinge of jealousy, Rāvana said to the fierce Rākshasās known as Kinkaras, "Go at once! Do not allow the monkey to escape. Do not kill it. Catch it and bring it to me." Obeying Rāvana, the Kinkaras immediately took up weapons like the trident, burning missile, sword and spear, and sped like the turbulent overflowing sea that destroyed the coast. The moment these Rākshasās were told that they had a fight before them, they were as happy as if they had consumed honey. *These Kinkaras, in their vastness, excelled the forest. In the noise and uproar that they made, they excelled the ocean. In fame, they were loftier than the sky. In appearance, they were bigger than mountains!* The Kinkaras who had acquired the fame of having defeated both the Devas and the Asuras, were ashamed that they had now been assigned the task of fighting and defeating a mere monkey, accustomed to eating only flowers and fruits. These Kinkaras had swords tucked in their waists, armours around their chests, heroes' anklets, huge shoulders spreading out almost till the end of the eight directions, long hands that could touch the clouds, heads that hit the sky and legs with which they could push mountains. Their words were like thunder coming out of the clouds. They sported scars on their shoulders caused by weapons hurled at them by the Devas as well as the Asuras. Their fierce teeth looked like crescent moons. With raging eyes, the Kinkaras had shining weapons like discs, pestles, sharp-edged swords, curved steel clubs, conches, hammers, spears, véls, tridents, thorny arrows, thunderbolts with golden handles, ropes to bind and drag enemies, lustrous axes, bows, and sharp-edged iron studs.

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They wore divine ornaments made of bright gold. Their weapons as well as their bodies shed lustre. They had mountain-like shoulders. They pushed those in front of them, urging them to move fast, unaware of what was impeding their movement. In their anxiety to offer battle, the Kinkaras moved so fast that they scorched those in front of them with their hot breath. They had mouths puckered with anger, possessed brightness similar to lightning due to the deadly weapons they held, had strong bows and fast-moving legs and were as awesome as the pralaya clouds. The Kinkaras reached Hanuman and shouted, "The destruction of the cool Asōka grove as well as the removal of the red hillock was done by one and the same monkey. Can there be a greater shame for us than this?" *The din and noise raised by the Kinkaras exceeded the combined sound of the beating of drums, the twang of bow-strings, the blowing of conches and the roar of the waves of the turbulent ocean during the dissolution of the world. Some Kinkaras flew, finding no space to walk through the streets, some bent their eyebrows as well as the bows in their hands, some others emitted furious smoke and heaved big sighs.* In their eagerness to reach Hanuman, one tried to overtake the other! Finding the streets of Lanka not broad enough for their march, they were annoyed. Swinging their swords, puckering their mouths in anger, slapping their shoulders, powdering the stones under their feet, and grinding their teeth in fiery rage, the Kinkaras proceeded. Raising a thunderous roar, they marched towards the Asōka grove, causing pain to the wide earth. Itching for a fight after having defeated all the Asuras, Nāgas and those in Kubera's capital Azhagāpuri, these Kinkaras roamed about challenging everyone. Commands like, 'Kick the mountains!' 'Drink the tidal waters!' 'Pull down the sun from the sky!' 'Squeeze the floating clouds!' 'Grind Ādisesha!' and 'Cull out and lift this land!' could all be executed collectively, by each one of these Kinkaras. The dust that rose as they marched forward spread to the celestial world and filled the eyes of the Devas. These Kinkaras who had never retreated, marched towards Hanuman with the speed of arrows. *Like mighty clouds approaching a mountain, like a pride of lions, like strong-legged tigers, like innumerable tall fiends, like the Hālāhala poison, these Kinkaras surged forward.* Sparks of fire flew from their eyes, smoke came out of their breath and their spears shone brightly. They roared like thunder and converged on the Asōka grove from all directions with great speed which gave rise to the pralaya wind and pushed even the sound of thunder upwards. The Kinkaras surrounded the Asōka grove, which had become bald, like the sky bereft of clouds.

Hanuman stood like the Kailasa mountain touching the sky. He heard the war-cry which was louder than the sound of thunder during the rainy season. He also saw the

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Kinkaras advancing towards him. *Hanuman, who was greater than all, was happy that only because he destroyed the well-protected Asōka grove, was he able to meet the Rākshasās in a combat.* The Kinkaras surrounded Hanuman and said, "It is he! It is he! It is he!" Deciding to capture him, they encircled him and fought with the speed of wind. The black colour of their bodies, ushered in sudden darkness. They hurled several types of deadly and shining weapons at Hanuman with such a noise, that the earth, the mountains, the sky and the beautiful city of Lanka were shaken by the sound! Some of the Kinkaras opened their cavernous mouths, some were so ferocious that smoke spread everywhere, some of them walked with such firm and strong steps that the shoulders and neck of multi-hooded Ādisesha became one, while some others threw weapons and burnt every place. *Hanuman, the embodiment of dharma, understood that the Kinkaras had come to attack him.* He went close to a tall tree, uprooted it with one hand, and stood firmly like the Mandara mountain in the midst of the Rākshasās. With the tree in his hands, Hanuman beat every Kinkara with such force and fury that even the thunder that pulverised huge mountains, was drowned. Blood flowed like a river from the injured mountain-like shoulders of the Kinkaras. Holding each other firmly out of sheer fright, they rolled on the ground and were found dead when their heads were crushed by the feet of Hanuman. Even as a few Kinkaras were throwing weapons at Hanuman, they lost their huge eyes and crescent-like teeth. *A few of them had their necks and heads severed. Some of them died with the destruction of their trembling bodies. A few Kinkaras were kicked by Hanuman and their chests were smashed. Many of them were killed on the spot. A number of Kinkaras were flung by Hanuman into the mountain, into the sky, and into the ocean. A few of them vomited blood out of fear, a few fell and rolled on the dust unable to stand, and some others died, shedding their lives all over. Some of them went to Kubera's Azhagāpuri, some of them fell into the sea, some were torn apart, some were encircled by Hanuman's tail and fell on the ground spinning like tops. Several of their weapons like the sword, the bow, the axe and the trident were shattered by Hanuman. Their teeth were smashed, their legs were severed, their hands were cut off, while their lives were instantly terminated. A few Kinkaras died when dragged by Hanuman, a few died when they were hit, a few died when they were thrown afar, a few died when caught, a few died by merely hearing his roar, a few died when beaten by him, a few died when Hanuman looked at them with anger and some others died of fright when they saw others dying!*

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Hanuman who was moving along like a kite, ran and caught some of the Kinkaras and slew them. He slew some by dashing one against the other; he slew a few by beating them with trees full of branches; he searched for a few of them who were lying underneath the corpses and then slew them. Hanuman who was considered a mountain, smashed anyone who fell on him, and then slew him. He went close to those who wanted to approach him in a row and hugged all of them so hard that they were crushed. If any Kinkara patted Hanuman, he would in turn pat him and kill him. Even when the Kinkaras became unconscious and forgot to fight Hanuman, he would not leave them, but would kill them. If they got back their senses and woke up, then, too he would not spare them. Even if they tried to fly away into the sky or stand on the earth, he would not let them. The brains and fat of the Kinkaras (strewn all over the streets of Lanka) mixed with the flow of blood gave an impression that the gateways of Lanka were vomiting blood. *Hanuman acted with the speed of thought and flung the Kinkaras on the trees, after collecting them with his hands and tail. Owing to the impact, blood flowed from their crushed bodies like cane-juice flowing from crushed canes.* The force with which Hanuman flung the Kinkaras with his huge hands, made some of them smash their own abodes by their fall. A few Kinkaras, as they fell, destroyed their wives who were hit by their legs and killed their own children on whom their weapons fell. Hanuman, who resembled a big killer elephant, was also merciful. *Taking pity on the afflicted Rākshasis, he spared their lives and directed them to go home. He spared the lives of Rākshasās who were just married and sent them back to their abodes. He even released Rākshasās who had 'minor' quarrels with their wives and asked them to go back.* The bodies of the slain Kinkaras were found in the whole of Lanka; on trees, in the courtyards of all the houses, in all the streets including the junctions of four roads and in all the places where the Rākshasās lived, and the entire Lanka including the sky. *The number of Kinkaras that were killed could not be counted. Even Yama got exhausted, unable to take these lives to his abode!*

When the destruction of the Kinkaras was going on, a few of them got infatuated with the fight and surrounded Hanuman on all sides with their huge dark bodies like a mass of clouds. Hanuman, who was fighting with all of them, looked like the sun. *Their numerical strength, the noise that they made and their dark colour, made the Kinkaras appear like the dark ocean which was to be churned, while Hanuman was like the huge Mandara mountain out to churn it. The Kinkaras appeared like innumerable serpents, while Hanuman was like Garuda, the king of eagles, come to suppress them.*

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The Kinkaras who had surrounded Hanuman were like a herd of elephants, while Hanuman was like the lion who ruled the animal kingdom. The uproar raised by the happy Devas who lauded Hanuman liberally, far exceeded the din and noise made by the Kinkaras. The innumerable wounds inflicted on the body of Hanuman could not be distinguished from the equally innumerable flowers that were showered on his body from above by the happy Devas. Standing for a while on the left side and for a while on the right side, Hanuman looked like a kite. He was cool without sweating or sighing. All the Kinkaras, however preferred to die in the battle rather than escape alive. There were none more heroic.

The guards who were in charge of the Asōka grove saw the Kinkaras dying even before a single syllable was uttered. With fear in their hearts, they ran to Rāvana with trembling legs and hands, crossing thousands of dead bodies. Unable even to speak, they told Rāvana about the happenings in the Asōka grove through the language of signs. From the eloquence of their fright, Rāvana understood everything. Spitting fire through his mouths, he asked the guards, "What happened to the Kinkaras sent by me? Have they been killed and destroyed? Have they given up their fight, disobeying my orders? Or have they gone to another country after their defeat? What exactly did happen?" The guards replied, "These Kinkaras were neither afraid to fight, nor did they run away. *All of them have been killed, and wiped out, by a lone monkey, like the annihilation of the clan of a lowly person who knowingly gives false evidence.*" Rāvana felt sad that a shameful thing like this should happen when the eight celestials in charge of the eight directions were available in his court to do his bidding. He looked at the guards of the Asōka grove and said, "Probably you do not know what exactly happened." The trembling guards kept silent. They were too frightened even to open their mouths and utter a word. Rāvana then asked them, "Tell me whether this grim news of a monkey killing the Kinkaras, was told by someone, or you actually saw it happening." They told Rāvana, "Hiding some distance away, we saw the monkey consuming the lives of all the Kinkaras. This monkey has not yet left the place."

9. THE SLAYING OF JAMBUMĀLI

There was, in the court of Rāvana, a mighty Rākshasa known as Jambumāli. Possessing huge shoulders, he resembled a mountain. He was fearless and looked like a serpent. Rāvana told Jambumāli, "Go with an army of swift horses, catch hold of this monkey, bind it with ropes and bring it to me. Do not kill it. I ask you to perform this deed and mitigate my anger." Jambumāli bowed to Rāvana and said, "Dear lord, you

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have thought deeply and then commanded me in the presence of countless Rākshasās to do this task. I consider this a great honour. Who is more fortunate than I?" Carrying with him the weapon given to him by his father, Jambumāli left the place accompanied by fierce elephants, chariots, cavalry and several other types of armies. *These armies were equipped with a variety of weapons like the javelin, the elephant-goad, the sharp spear, the discus sparkling with fire, Yama's rope and multi-horned steel balls, huge trees and bows and arrows.* The din made by several instruments like huge conches and the sound of the chariot wheels, the neighing of horses and the trumpeting of elephants, filled even the celestial world, and made it impossible for the Devas to hear each other while conversing among themselves!

Jambumāli's army consisted of ten thousand chariots, twenty thousand elephants, forty thousand horses and eighty thousand warriors! Several of these warriors were masters in archery and had fierce eyes. Many of them had received boons and possessed strong and massive shoulders. The quivers on their backs were always full, while their chests were protected by golden armour. The mahouts who were riding the elephants not only knew how to control them, but were also experts in the art of wielding weapons. Similarly, those who rode the horses had mastered all types of mounts as well as the methods of using war-weapons and rode with the speed of their minds. Heading this vast army and moving in a chariot towards Hanuman, Jambumāli frightened the Devas with his big eyes emitting fire like a volcano. Hanuman, however, was disappointed that more Rākshasās had not come to fight with him. He had by then assumed a huge size (touching the celestial objects) and was seated on a high pedestal at the Asōka grove-entrance (which looked like the rainbow), awaiting the arrival of the Rākshasās. The appearance of Hanuman at the gateway of the Asōka grove surrounded by sparkling red gems, was similar to the bright sun rising from the sea. *Hanuman's roar which was like the twang of Rāma's bow, was so loud that the clouds thundered and fell down in pieces, the roar of the waves of the sea was silenced, the serpents living in the mountains ejected their poison and lost their lives, and fear gripped even the Rākshasās who were accustomed to killing others. Hanuman slapped his shoulders with such fury that the arrogant elephants standing in the eight directions became subdued, Yama became frightened, stars began falling down from the celestial region, and cracks appeared on the mountains and the earth.* The Rākshasās who came like the waves of the sea to fight Hanuman, raised a roar as soon as they approached him. Stumbling over the corpses of the Kinkaras who had been killed by Hanuman, these Rākshasās started wondering how they would reach the fighting

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arena. Jambumāli divided his army into various divisions, made them surround Hanuman, and ordered them to converge on him. On seeing Jambumāli, Hanuman's shoulders swelled with pride with the satisfaction of having achieved his objective!

The great Hanuman stood in the battlefield with his shining forehead as the vanguard of his army, the innumerable stiff hairs on his body as the battalions on his flanks, his two strong hands as his supporting armies, and his tail as the rearguard. In short, Hanuman had transformed his whole body into a huge army of warriors. The angry Rākshasās hurled shining weapons at him after blowing white conches and raising a din with their taut bow-strings. Standing at the decorated entrance to the Asōka grove, Hanuman smashed all the weapons thrown at him, with his bare hands, forcing them to fall into the sea! With the fury of fire he picked up an iron rod lying on the ground and stood up. The speed with which he was fighting, made it impossible for anyone to make out whether he stood up, or got down, or became erect, or turned this way or that way. With the iron rod, Hanuman hit all the Rākshasās irrespective of whether they had collectively faced him, or stood away at a distance, or actually participated in the fight. With his left hand, he destroyed the weapons which were hurled at him, while with his right he fought and killed the elephants and horses, and smashed the chariots. Hanuman's onslaught was so powerful that mighty elephants lost the flagstaffs planted on them, their tusks, their trunks, their huge feet, and their very arrogance! Chariots were crushed along with their wheels and their strings of jewels. Even the fast steeds yoked to the chariots were destroyed. Some of the horses in the cavalry broke their necks and legs, a few rolled on the earth, a few got beaten and were in agony, a few were burnt, and a few lost their lives and fell. Some of the Rākshasās who fought on foot were frightened by the very sight of Hanuman, some swooned and after a while regained their senses and stood up, some overcame their initial shock and fought with him but died and rolled on the earth, and some fell down without immediately losing their lives but finally died after intense suffering. *Hanuman destroyed the elephants by using other elephants against them; he smashed and killed the horses by using other horses against them; with the warriors, he killed the Rākshasās who fought on foot, while he used the chariots for destroying the chariots.* Several elephants died by falling into the sludge of the blood and brains of the Rākshasās killed by Hanuman. Broad-shouldered Rākshasa heroes with curved teeth, along with their huge elephants, bows and spears were all trampled into one huge mass. *Hanuman was seen moving in the battlefield like the incomparable regal mace that perennially rules the state or like the knowledge (of noble persons) that*

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conquers evil. Hanuman was in every object and was seen everywhere. He was on the ground, he was in the air and in the very eyes of the Rākshasās. *The omnipresence of Hanuman, who was a devotee of Lord Mahāvishnu, could be compared to the all-pervading Lord Mahāvishnu Himself!* The iron rod wielded by Hanuman dispatched the heads of several Rākshasās into the sky. A few heads hit against mountains. A few fell as far as the boundaries of the eight directions. A few hit against each other and got stuck, while a few more fell helter-skelter on the heads already lying on the ground.

Jambumāli stood alone, like a huge and solitary elephant whose mates had been killed by an angry and fierce lion. The whole battlefield surrounding Jambumāli was filled with sludge made of earth, blood, and slain horses and Rākshasās. Hanuman whose body was full of wounds, looked like a tree blooming with flowers. He told Jambumāli, "You have but one weapon. You have but one chariot. You stand alone, unable to protect all those who came with you! If you fight with me, you, too, will die. It is not fair on my part to slay a weakling like you. Save your life and go back." Looking derisively at Hanuman and emitting fire, Jambumāli said, "You seem to think that I, too, am like one of those who have died in the fight," and shot at Hanuman, sharp, shining arrows in tens, hundreds and hundreds of thousands. Hanuman laughed loudly and said, "You appear to be capable of fighting well with a bow in your hand against those who are unarmed. But with an iron rod in hand is it difficult for me to defeat you?" With the help of the iron rod, Hanuman prevented Jambumāli's arrows from piercing him. Seeing that the arrows dispatched by him were falling ineffectively on the ground, Jambumāli became furious and tried to surround Hanuman with his chariot but failed. Then, with a sharp arrow, Jambumāli broke Hanuman's iron rod. Vexed with the loss of the rod, Hanuman jumped into Jambumāli's chariot, caught hold of his bow and threw him down. *Jambumāli's open mouth which was making a great deal of noise was silenced.* His huge head rolled with him to the ground. Jambumāli was strangled by Hanuman with the string of his own bow. Having done this, Hanuman kicked Jambumāli's chariot, charioteer and horses, to a pulp, got back to the entrance to the Asōka grove and sat there as before. The bodies of the dead Rākshasās, dripping with blood, thrown by Hanuman in front of their respective wailing widows, drowned the whole of Lanka in fear. The divine dharma became happy at the ebbing of the strength of the Rākshasās in Lanka. The celestial guards who entered Rāvana's palace to tell him all that had happened, could not utter a word out of sheer fright. They started weeping in fits. Rāvana laughed and

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asked the guards not to tremble with fear. Then the guards told him, "O lord, all our Rākshasās have been wiped out in the battle. Even Jambumāli has been killed. A lone monkey did all this?

10. THE SLAYING OF THE FIVE CHIEFS

The words of the guards made Rāvana furious. With blood coming out of his eyes, he said, "I myself will go and catch this monkey." The five chiefs of Rāvana's army (Viroopākshan, Yoopākshan, Durdaran, Brihasan and Pāsakarnan) who were in his court, told him, "If you go after a small monkey for a fight, it will be like Garuda trying to fight with an insect. Even the Kailasa mountain which was afraid of you all these days will lose its fear. *The Trinity of Gods who were vanquished by you, will ridicule you and laugh at the sight of your fighting a monkey.* It may also look as if you do not have adequate people with you! So far, you have sent only weaklings who are incapable of defeating this monkey in a fight. If you are interested in your own good, you should send us to fight it." The five chiefs then made obeisance to Rāvana with folded hands. When Rāvana acceded to their request, the chiefs felt as if they had obtained the three worlds and became happy. They prostrated themselves before Rāvana, touching the ground with their foreheads. Coming out of the palace, the chiefs asked all the Rākshasās, who could muster countless strong chariots and horses, to join them. The command of the five chiefs was made known to all through the beating of drums by Valluvars sitting on the backs of elephants. Immediately, huge armies spread all over like foamy waves. War-drums roared like the clouds that gave incessant rains. Weapons were seen everywhere shining like streaks of lightning. Wearing golden anklets, with their quivers full of arrows, the Rākshasās donned their armour. The rutting fluid flowing from the elephants turned all the pathways into rivers. The wheels of chariots and the foam coming from the mouths of the steeds again converted these rivers into mud. *The sound raised by the speeding chariots and horses, the sound of the anklets worn by warriors, and the sound raised by different musical instruments, combined, and exceeded three times the sound of the roaring pralaya sea.* Fifty thousand chariots, fifty thousand elephants, a hundred thousand horses and two hundred thousand warriors on foot assembled. There was no space for this huge army to move. The sharp and shining weapons of the warriors struck against each other and raised sparks of fire which went upwards and burnt the clouds! The exquisite shining gems dangling on the sides of the decorated elephants (of noble pedigree) raised a thunderous sound. The black eyeballs of these elephants emitted

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fire and the jewels decorating their cheeks shone like the sun emerging from dark clouds.

The wives and relatives of the warriors who set out for the battle, tried to prevent them and said, "No one who went to fight with this monkey has come back alive. They have all been killed and destroyed." But the warriors refused to listen to them. *The five chiefs of the army appeared like the five elements coming together. It would be an understatement to describe them as animated dark clouds!* Like Soorya, these five chiefs came on their five chariots with great fanfare and a loud noise from the vanguard. The sound from their bow-strings was like thunder. *The five chiefs were like the five senses, the enemies of sages and Devas. These five leaders of the army had such powerful and strong shoulders that neither the Vajrāyudham of Devendra, nor the deathly weapons of Varuna and Yama, nor the Trident of Lord Siva could make an impression on them even to the extent of a pin's prick!* The five chiefs had their ear-rings made out of the elephants' tusks broken by Rāvana's chest, while they wore the golden jewels forfeited by vanquished Kubera! Devendra, after his defeat by Rāvana, had tried to escape from the battlefield riding on his elephant Irāvatam. The five chiefs were so strong that they had firmly held Irāvatam's tail and challenged Devendra to proceed further. On another occasion they demonstrated their strength by binding the hands and legs of Yama, just to mitigate the wrath of Rāvana. Their chests scoffed at mountains! Their shoulders scoffed at the waves of the mighty ocean. They could kill faster than Yama. The fire from their eyes scoffed at the fire blown by a goldsmith! Possessing such prowess, the five chiefs reached the entrance to the Asōka grove and arrayed their armies on different sides. Watching all this from above, Devendra and the others were frightened. Hanuman, however, was unconcerned. Pleased that these Rākshasās would be destroyed before the day was over, Hanuman looked at the huge army surrounding him on all four sides and also looked at his own two shoulders. Countless Rākshasās watching Hanuman wondered how this monkey with a small head could defeat and destroy the Rākshasās who had vanquished even the Devas! Standing at the decorated entrance to the Asōka grove, Hanuman grew in size till he pierced the sky. The Rākshasās who saw this, became angry and shot arrows at him to the accompaniment of the blowing of conches and the beating of drums. *The countless weapons they hurled at Hanuman, fell on the roots of his hair and gave him a pleasant feeling, and he slept for a while.*

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Infuriated, the Rākshasa heroes joined together and clashed with him, wanting to destroy him. Hanuman was eager to kill these Rākshasās, hoping that more would come in search of him. Taking an iron pillar in his hands, he smashed the weapons hurled at him and hit the Rākshasās without sparing even the row of huge dark elephants in the battlefield. Later, with the help of the tusks pulled out of the elephants, he destroyed the chariots; and with the help of the wheels of the chariots, he killed the Rākshasās who were fighting on foot. Then he took the swords from their hands and killed the horses. He caught hold of two chariots in his two hands and destroyed two elephants. Lifting two huge elephants, he dashed them against two rows of horses that flanked him. He uprooted a mountain and smashed a thousand chariots. He kicked and trampled the elephants which charged at him. He rubbed the horses against the ground and jumped on the huge heads of the Rākshasās, biting and punching them. Elephants with eyes emitting fire, thrown upwards into the sky by Hanuman fell into the sea like huge sinking ships, while the chariots hurled by him fell into the sea like the sun's chariot dipping into the western sea. Several horses thrown into the sky also fell into the sea emitting fire from their mouths. *The Rākshasās who were tied into a bundle by the tail of Hanuman and discharged into the sea, were spun like the Mandara mountain spun by the serpent Vāsuki during the churning of the ocean of milk.* These elephants, Rākshasās and horses had begun to bleed profusely even before they fell into the sea. The river of blood thus formed, could be seen flowing towards the sea. The dead bodies strewn on the battlefield had protruding teeth (on the two sides of their cavernous mouths) which looked like crescent moons, had eyes which emitted fire and hands which held unsheathed weapons. The huge heap of these bodies was so high that it touched the sky shutting out the view of the decorated entrance to the Asōka grove. *All the Rākshasās were destroyed in the battlefield by Hanuman who wielded the iron pillar in the same manner in which Lord Siva the father of Muruga wielded His Trident.* For Hanuman, the iron pillar, trees and his own hands, became weapons of war!

The Devas were happy that the entire Rākshasa army was destroyed. The city of Lanka, however, became concerned. The wailing of the citizens, sounding like the roaring sea, spread in all directions. The five chiefs of the army with their strong shoulders approached Hanuman. Their chariots were prevented from easy movement by the heaps of dead bodies lying on the ground. Still the chiefs pressed their chariots hard, went near Hanuman, raised battle cries, and shot thousands of arrows at him. He easily crushed the arrows with his hands, jumped into the chariot of Durdaran, one

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of the chiefs, and made his chariot immobile. Even before the running chariot was smashed, Hanuman leapt into the sky. With the iron pillar, he attacked Durdaran who in turn tried to save himself with his bow. When the latter found that the bow was broken, he flung it at Hanuman and hit him with a mountain. *The knowledgeable Hanuman warded it off and killed Durdaran with his iron pillar.* The remaining four chiefs were furious. They advanced towards Hanuman like the raging pralaya fire, and shot arrows at him. With blood dripping from his shoulders, an enraged Hanuman came down and hurled a fiery boulder at these chiefs, who pulverised the same. The persistent stream of arrows shot by the Rākshasa leaders, pierced Hanuman's body and came out. Hanuman caught hold of the chariot of Viroopākshan (another chief) and threw it into the sky along with him. Even before the chariot could fall down, Viroopākshan jumped onto the earth. *Like a fierce lion pouncing on a rutted elephant, Hanuman jumped on him and trampled his huge body, turning it into pulp.*

The remaining three chiefs came charging angrily in their chariots towards Hanuman, challenging him with the words, "Where will you go now?" Anjana's son, leonine Hanuman, lifted two of the three chariots with his broad shoulders and threw them up towards the sky, striking terror even among the celestials. The charioteers and the horses of these two chariots died, and the Rākshasās soared into the air. Hanuman quickly went after them before they could disappear into the sky and destroyed their bows and quivers. The Rākshasās, Yoopākshan and Brihasan, stayed in the sky and fought with Hanuman. These two chiefs were tall and had huge open mouths with white teeth and black bodies and looked like the two serpents, Rāhu and Kétu. *Hanuman who looked like the sun, strangled both of them with his tail and killed them.* Pāsakarnan, the lone survivor of the five chiefs, stood before Hanuman. *Like a lion springing on a hillock, Hanuman fell on the head of this Rākshasa and smashed him along with his chariot. Thus ended the lives of these treacherous, deceitful and wicked Rākshasa chiefs, who were like the five senses, while their conqueror Hanuman was like the incarnation of knowledge!* The guards of the Asōka grove watched the destruction of all the Rākshasās and their five chiefs. Fearing that this monkey would kill them, the guards fled to Rāvana. They said, "O lord! Our entire army and the five chiefs have been destroyed by the monkey. Even though all the Rākshasās and their leaders persistently fought with arrows, they were killed by the monkey which is now sitting idle in the Asōka grove because there is no one else available for a fight."

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The Rākshasa army surrounded Hanuman with fanfare and rained their weapons on him. The Devas protecting the eight directions sweated. The celestial and terrestrial worlds trembled. Solitary Hanuman nonchalantly faced the Rākshasa army. The fierce weapons hurled by them fell on him and were broken. Hanuman retaliated. As a result, the elephants lost their lives and the chariots were pulversied. Countless horses and warriors were slain before a single syllable was uttered, like bundles of dry hay burnt in a raging fire. *One wondered whether Yama had a thousand crore assistants to complete the task of taking away to his abode the lives of the countless Rākshasās killed.* Even if those who had already come, those who were in the process of coming, and those who were yet to come, were to fight Hanuman collectively, there was no way of stopping him. Looking thrice as bright as the dazzling pralaya sun, Hanuman converted all the Rākshasās who fought with him into boneless worms. The dead bodies rapidly moved in the river of blood. Anyone who saw the manner in which Hanuman killed all the Rākshasās would have said on that day, that Yama had robbed the city of Lanka of all its lives. *A few among the frightened survivors said, "The chariots that were smashed were more in number." A few others said, "Ferocious warriors with red faces died in greater number." Some others claimed, "More horses were killed," while a few other survivors said, "The rutted elephants killed by Hanuman were greater in number." The entire army of the Rākshasās looked like a wide bowl full of yoghurt, while Hanuman looked like the staff churning that yoghurt!*

The few Rākshasās who remained alive trembled with fear and ran away deserting Akshakumāran. He stood alone and became furious. His eyes started emitting fire. Selecting sharp and powerful arrows and standing on his chariot which resembled Soorya's chariot, Akshakumāran, the younger brother of Indrajit, faced Hanuman who had learnt the art of consuming countless lives in a single day. The Devas thought that they had acquired the gift of unblinking eyes only to see, without a moment's break, the fight about to commence between Akshakumāran and Hanuman. Akshakumāran shot fourteen arrows spitting fire at Hanuman who hit all of them with an iron pillar and dashed them to the ground. Akshakumāran immediately took out several powerful and sharp arrows and pulverised the iron pillar. For weaponless Hanuman, only his hands became his army! He jumped into Akshakumāran's chariot, destroyed it and killed the charioteer and the horses. A few arrows shot by Akshakumāran fell on the chest of Hanuman, while a few entered his shoulders and disappeared. Hanuman caught hold of Akshakumāran's bow and broke it. Even the sword with which Akshakumāran pierced Hanuman was smashed by him, raising sparks of fire

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everywhere. When Akshakumāran tried to grasp Hanuman with his strong arms, the latter, bound him with his tail and mounted on him. And then, Hanuman gave him such a hard blow on his cheek that his sword-like teeth as well as the sparkling jewels that he wore fell on the ground and his bowels came out. Holding Akshakumāran's neck with one hand, Hanuman gave him a hard punch and jumped aside. *Using the flowing blood as fluid for grinding, and the earth as the millstone, Hanuman, whose fame will outlast even the seven worlds, ground with his diamond-like hands, Akshakumāran's body into a paste, in the presence of the celestials and terrestrials!*

Hanuman's action caused such terror among the remaining Rākshasās, that a few of them hid themselves in the flowing river of blood. A few of them hid themselves under the heap of dead bodies. A few of them died out of fear. A few of them became so frightened that they did not know in which direction to go. A few of them took the form of the fish and entered the sea. Some of them attempted to escape Hanuman's wrath by assuming different forms like those of goats, birds, sages and women. *A few of the Rākshasās became so scared of Hanuman that they started disowning even their kin who came to embrace them, proclaiming that they were Devas or humans, and not Rākshasās!* The wailing of Rākshasis was heard throughout the world. There were several poignant scenes of Rākshasis wailing and crying amidst the dead bodies of their husbands. A Rākshasi found the severed body of her husband lying on the ground and still shaking. She took his head in her hands and kept it tight against the trunk of his body and wailed aloud, "Show my beloved husband again to me." Another Rākshasi (whose beauty was beyond the capabilities of a painter), with a similar experience, wailed aloud, "My lord, you have danced enough, please stop it," and embraced the body of her husband with her soft arms. The guards of the Asōka grove saw how all the Rākshasās were killed and felt that thereafter it would be impossible for anyone to escape death. They fell at the feet of Rāvana and gave him the news of the total destruction of the huge army. Akshakumāran's mother, Mandōdhari (the daughter of Mayan), with tears overflowing from her fish-like eyes and with her hair touching the ground and brushing the dust, fell at the feet of her husband, Rāvana, the great-grandson of Brahma, and cried aloud beating her belly with her hands. All the Rākshasis of Lanka cried, falling at Rāvana's feet. Even the Devas who were the custodians of the Asōka grove did the same, suppressing their secret joy!

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12. HANUMAN BOUND

Indrajit, the vanquisher of Devendra, rose angrily like furious Siva, when he heard of the death of his brother, Akshakumāran. Mounting a chariot pulled by twelve hundred fiends, he got ready for battle. The roar, of the heroes' anklets and the roar of the drums that accompanied Indrajit was so loud that Devendra trembled with fright. Fearing that the battle would reach a high pitch, the Trinity of Gods stopped meditating. Whenever the thought of his younger brother came to his mind, Indrajit shed copious tears. Looking at his magnificent bow, Indrajit laughed aloud with anger and said, "It is not merely the life of my brave brother that has been snatched by a monkey living on the branches of a tree. It is the fame of my father that stands eroded now." Indrajit's army consisted of countless warriors, twelve thousand elephants and an equal number of chariots. Reaching the palace of Rāvana and prostrating himself at his feet, Indrajit wept and wailed. Embracing him, Rāvana, too, wept. *Then Indrajit looked at his father and said, "You do not realise what is good. You do the wrong things and grieve after the events. Dear father, even after knowing that this was a fierce and capable monkey, it was you who were responsible for the death of more and more Rākshasa warriors. Not a single soldier who had accompanied the Kinkaras, Jambumāli and the five chiefs could return. This monkey could therefore be a combination of the Trinity of Gods!* Once upon a time, you had won all the three worlds including the Kailasa mountain; whereas today, you are wasting your time assessing the strength of this monkey which has killed Akshakumāran. To have thought that the monkey could be defeated even after it had killed the Kinkaras and others was foolish. Still, I assure you that I will in a moment catch this monkey and bring it before you. Please do not worry henceforth. May you live long!"

Indrajit was seen in the midst of the huge army of chariots, horses, warriors and elephants, like the Meru standing out during pralaya. Even though he had defeated everyone in all the ten directions, he was aghast at Hanuman's fighting capability that day. *Indrajit wondered, "I find blood flowing all around. There are huge heaps of dead bodies and innumerable war-weapons lying all over the battlefield. The whole scene gives me the impression that I am in a strange new world. If a mere monkey could destroy these mighty Rākshasās, with what army do we confront Rāma when he comes to fight us?"* All these thoughts troubled the mind of Indrajit who had, till then, never known sorrow! Looking at the corpses of the Rākshasās who had once protected the

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king, and who were like the very eyes and life of the ruler of Lanka, Indrajit bit his lips in agony. He contemptuously thought, "If just two human beings and a monkey are responsible for the humiliation of my aunt Soorpanakha and the death of Khara and others, and the slaying of Akshakumāran, then I am indeed a 'hero'!" As Indrajit drove hard in his chariot despite the obstacles of heaps of dead bodies and a sea of blood, he saw with his red eyes (which looked like heated copper) the battered body of his brother, Akshakumāran, lying like that of Hiranyan torn by Lord Narasimha. Indrajit's bow fell. Copious tears mixed with blood and fire came out of his eyes. He wailed aloud, "O dear one, even Yama, afraid of your father's leaf-like spear, did not dare to take away your life. While persons living in different worlds were scared to do this deed, I wonder to which world you have so easily departed, deserting us!" *Though the loss of Akshakumāran pained Indrajit, the anger in him suppressed his sorrow and got the better of it, like a nail hammered by another nail!*

Hanuman who was like the brave and angry Lord Siva, looked at Indrajit advancing in his chariot like Soorya. He thought, "This must be Indrajit. It is only my terrifying deeds that have brought him here. I am sure that either victory or defeat will be decided today. If Indrajit is killed by me it will be the end of Rāvana! Fearing that he would be destroyed, Rāvana will hand over chaste Seeta to us. This action will enable all the Rākshasās to cast away their animosity, relieve Devendra from his sorrow and destroy the 'protection' Lanka now enjoys. I will have the satisfaction of defeating Rāvana all by myself." As Hanuman was thinking thus, the infantry, and the army of elephants, chariots and horses jumped into the fray. The great Hanuman uprooted a huge Marāmaram and attacked everybody. *As a result, a few elephants were hit, a few elephants rolled on the ground, a few elephants fell one over the other and got buried, a few elephants ran amuck and died fighting amongst themselves, and a few elephants died falling on the dust.* The chariots, too, were not spared. Some of them lost their axles, some crashed to the ground, some were pulverised, some of them came too close to each other and were crushed, and some of them fell sideways. Even the horses succumbed to Hanuman's onslaught. The warriors who confronted him had the same fate. A few of them were caught by him, the bodies of a few were sliced, a few of them found their huge shoulders severed and a few lost their heads. *The arrows shot by the Rākshasās at Hanuman were as ineffective as thin red-hot iron rods hitting a rock.* Having lost the entire army of warriors, elephants, chariots and cavalry, an angry Indrajit approached Hanuman who repeatedly challenged him to a fight.

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The twang of Indrajit's bow was so loud that the head of Devendra, the innumerable thunderous clouds, and the thousand hoods of Ādishesha, the divine serpent, shook with fear. Immediately, Hanuman slapped his own handsome shoulders even more loudly, drowning the sound raised by Indrajit's bow, shattering the mountains and splitting the earth. Indrajit told Hanuman, "You are a great one who has no equal in this world. You can challenge anybody. Still I assure you that this day is the last day of your life." Hanuman replied, "You treacherous Rākshasa, today is the last day for all of you! This will be revealed to you by the limitless power of my shoulders." Deciding to shatter Hanuman's self confidence, Indrajit shot arrows sharper and more potent than the thunderbolt of Devendra and drew blood from Hanuman's head and chest. This angered Hanuman. *Without shrinking in size, he stood tall and erect like the fame and name of Rāma who had withstood even the cruel words of his stepmother, Kaikeyi, and had given away his vast kingdom to his younger brother, Bharata.* Unable to see the whole form of Hanuman, Indrajit, who had once vanquished and bound Devendra tightly with ropes, was now stunned. Hanuman stood loftily and threw away with his long arms, the sharp arrows shot by Indrajit. Hitting the Rākshasās with the same arrows, Hanuman smashed and killed Indrajit's charioteer and the fiends drawing the chariot. Indrajit immediately jumped onto another chariot brought to him by another charioteer, and covered Hanuman with countless sharp arrows. Hanuman just shook his body and the arrows fell off.

Indrajit dispatched more powerful arrows, hundreds at a time, and caused several wounds on the body of Hanuman who stood dazed for some time. Watching this, the unhappy Devas became unconscious. Their plight aroused Hanuman from his stupor. He caught hold of a huge tree, broke all the arrows shot at him in a row and finally hit Indrajit's head with the tree. The rubies decorating Indrajit's crown fell down and copious blood flowed from his body. He lost his senses for a while. Regaining his consciousness, he bit his crescent-moon-like teeth and shot a thousand arrows at Hanuman which shook his huge body. Infuriated Hanuman, moving faster than Rāma's arrow, hurled Indrajit along with his chariot into the sky and roared with satisfaction. Within the fraction of a second, both the chariot and Indrajit fell down towards the earth. The stinking blood that flowed from Indrajit's body was like the blood that oozed out of an ulcer. Even before his body touched the ground, Indrajit rose again into the sky. Hanuman who had assumed a huge form, in the mean time kicked and shattered all the chariots in the battlefield. Indrajit realised that he had neither a chariot available, nor enough strength left to fight with Hanuman. Finding that there was nothing else for him to do, Indrajit decided to use

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the incomparable weapon of Lord Brahma known as the Brahmāstram. Taking this divine dart in his huge hands, Indrajit worshipped it, fixed it to his mighty bow and aimed it at the shoulders of Hanuman. The whole universe including the world, the sky, the eight directions and the Meru trembled with fright. *The irrepressible Brahmāstram ejected several serpents with frightening eyes emitting fire. Hanuman's shoulders were tightly bound by these serpents.* He fell on the ground, like the moon and other celestial objects falling from the sky during pralaya, along with the tears of the god of dharma!

Realising that it was the Brahmāstram that had bound him, Hanuman did not want to disrespect it. He closed his eyes and kept quiet, obeying the command of the weapon more out of respect. Thinking that Hanuman had lost his strength, Indrajit approached him. Immediately, the rest of the Rākshasās, who, out of fear, had been hiding all along, surrounded Hanuman and started teasing him and pulling the serpents that bound him. *Lanka was like the ocean of milk. The Brahmāstram that dragged Hanuman in all directions was like the serpent Vāsuki. The Rākshasās who caught hold of the serpents and pulled them were like the celestials. Hanuman who was tied by the serpents, was like the Mandara mountain that churned the ocean of milk!* The great joy of all the Rākshasās and Rākshasis who raised a furore could only be compared to the joy of Lanka long ago when Indrajit had bound Devendra, and imprisoned him.

13. THE SEVERING OF THE ROPES

Several Rākshasās came running, pointed to Hanuman and said, "This monkey must be shot with arrows!" "Let this monkey be pierced with a spear, split with an axe and sliced with a sword." "Take the bowels out of this monkey and eat its flesh." "If this monkey is allowed to live, none of us will be alive." Rākshasis with collyrium-dyed eyes and others, surrounded Hanuman and tried to kill him complaining that it was a mistake to have allowed the monkey to go on thus, for such a long time. A few Rākshasās said, "This monkey is not an ordinary one. It cannot be killed by conventional poisonous weapons. This monkey, with its diamond-like body must either be pushed into the sea or must be thrown into fire." Many others stood in Hanuman's way and said, "Give back to us the lives of our kith and kin which you have taken away." Many Rākshasis who had lost their husbands in the battle, wept aloud saying, "None of us had ever lost our strong and beloved husbands so far. Today we are bereaved. We will not waste our time pining for them. We will not remove our

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māngalyams unless we stand on his head." As Hanuman was being taken through the streets, the roar raised by the citizens spread all over, making the sorrowing widows of Lanka happy. He saw all the big mansions smashed by the chariots and elephants he had lustily thrown into the sky. His huge shoulders bound by serpents, 'suffered' only as much as an old tree on which ants crawled! Several Rākshasis beat their bellies, became giddy afraid to have a full measure of his frightening form, and ran. Quite a few women were recounting his terrible deeds in the battlefield. *A few Rākshasās warned, "The face of this monkey is bright and exudes happiness as though it is bound by garlands made of flowers and not by poisonous serpents. It is dangerous to take it to the king in this state."* Some of the Rākshasās who saw the face of Hanuman felt that he had some ulterior motive and had purposely agreed to be bound by the serpents. They worshipped him and begged him not to be angry with them. Fifty thousand mighty Kinkaras, thrice as strong as Garuda, were pulling the serpents which bound Hanuman. Those who saw this wondered whether Yama had taken the form of a monkey and started a big war to contain the arrogance of the Rākshasās. Some thought that owing to Seeta's chastity, Lord Siva had come as a monkey to destroy Lanka. Several women from the celestial and serpent worlds arrived to watch Hanuman. Some of them felt that Lord Mahāvishnu and Lord Brahma had descended together into this world as a vānara. The Devas and others shed copious tears. None could say whether it was Seeta's grief, or pity for Hanuman, or the fall of dharma that made them weep.

Heroic Hanuman did not try to escape from the Rākshasās who were dragging him. He thought, "It is better that I go along with them and see Rāvana. The benevolence of my father, Vāyu, and the blessings of Rāma and the boon granted to me by Seeta, can make me come out of the Brahmāstram which binds me. Still it is preferable to go to Rāvana and tell him in his own court, in the presence of countless elders, what is in store for him. Rāvana may then change his mind and hand Seeta over to me. It will also be better if Rāvana can have a measure of our prowess and we in turn know his strength. As Rāma's messenger, let me convey a few things to Rāvana, hear from him what he has to say and know his stand. The killing of Vāli, the fate of the seven Marāmarams, the strength of the limitless vānara army and the prowess of Sugreeva, will all make a deep impression on him. If he is not convinced even after I tell him about the righteousness of Rāma, I shall destroy more than half of what is left of his army and quietly go back." With these thoughts, he allowed himself to be dragged by the Rākshasās. As Hanuman was being taken to Rāvana's

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palace by Indrajit, his messengers went in advance and told Rāvana that the monkey had been caught by Indrajit's Brahmāstram. Rāvana became happy and gave the messengers the pearl necklace decorating his scar-ridden chest. He asked them to instruct Indrajit to produce Hanuman alive before him.

Seeta was at first happy to hear that Hanuman had destroyed the well-protected Asōka grove and killed several Rākshasās. Learning of later events from Tirisadai, she became depressed losing interest even in her life. She suffered like the gentle swan which found her offspring caught in the hands of a cruel hunter. Giving vent to her feelings, Seeta said, "O Hanuman, you were able to grow to such a height that you touched the sky. Though you mastered all the arts, you were caught and bound by a deceitful Rākshasa. Is this the fate of dharma? Separated from Rāma, I am already in agony. The news about you causes me further grief. By showing me Rāma's ring, you gave me a reason to live. I also blessed you with long life extending beyond even pralaya. Though I know that my words will never prove false, you attained the stigma of getting bound, by exposing your mighty shoulders to the Rākshasās. I thought that you who saved my life, will study this place well and return with Rāma who in turn will kill Rāvana and take me back. But you have shattered my hopes." *Seeta whose chastity could burn even fire, became giddy suffering like a cow that had lost its calf.*

The redoubtable warrior, Indrajit, who had bound the great Hanuman, reached Rāvana's palace. The light emanating from the pearls dangling from Rāvana's royal lofty white umbrella gave cool shade and brightness as if from another moon! *Big scars made by the Cakrāyudham of Mahāvishnu, the Vajrāyudham of Devendra, the Soolāyudham of Siva, and the sword-like sharp nails of attractive women, could be seen on Rāvana's shoulders.* The light, from the red gems adorning the crowns on his heads was so bright that it could swallow the entire darkness of the infernal region. His pearl ornaments shone like the full moon. He wore a red garment tightly bound by a waist belt. The whole scene was as if darkness (Rāvana) dressed by the evening sky (red garment) was sitting under the shade of the moon (white umbrella) surrounded by stars (ornaments)! Charity, Védas and physical prowess (loftier than the sky) found an ideal place in Rāvana! The elephants guarding the eight directions, Dhruva and Ādisesha trembled with fear whenever he looked sternly in those directions. After seeing Seeta, the wife of Rāma the sole universal Lord, all the peacock-like women from the nether world to the highest celestial world of Brahmaloka, appeared to the eyes of Rāvana to be only men and not beautiful women. Excepting Lord Mahāvishnu, Lord Siva, monkeys, men and a few sages, all joined the Rākshasās and waited upon

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him, eager to do his bidding. The sweet music of the veena mingled with the pleasant singing of women from Devaloka, entered his ears. Menaka, the great Apsaras who could make even the sages forsake their penance, was by his side.

Each of the ten faces of Rāvana was absorbed in a different avocation. One face consumed the sweet pleasure reflected on the face of a beloved damsel by his side, while another face shared the intoxication of happiness with a young woman resting on another side. One face drank the nectar of love expressed through songs by a woman who was in love with him, while another face was lost in gazing at the beauty of the exquisite dancer in front of him. One face was involved in conducting state affairs with the Devas in the court, while another face was attempting to hold discussions with the ministers, army chiefs and ambassadors. One face was thinking about the evil deeds to which he was accustomed, while another face was thinking only of the form of Seeta. One face was wondering how to cross the huge sea of Seeta's chastity, while another face was lost in appreciating its own beauty reflected in the mirror held by the beautiful women surrounding him! Rāvana's mind went in search of Seeta, like bees which constantly went in search of nectar. Several women, who learnt of Rāvana's plight, were furious. The sharp shafts sent by their eyes attacked his twenty shoulders! *The 'thenral' mixed with the fragrance of honey and sandalwood paste, entered Rāvana and spread like poison throughout his body and tortured him.* For one bunch of 'lotus flowers' (the crescent-moon-like shining faces of sharp-eyed women), Rāvana was the sun which made them bloom. For another bunch of 'lotus flowers' (the clasped hands of the Devas), Rāvana was the moon which made them depressed!

Hanuman confronted Rāvana, the lord of all the eight directions and looked at him like Garuda looking at a mighty black cobra! Hanuman who wanted to snap the serpents that bound him and pounce on Rāvana, thought, "I desisted from killing him on an earlier occasion because I felt it was wrong to kill him while he was asleep. Now that I see him seated alert on a throne in all his splendour, why should I indulge in several thoughts? I will smash Rāvana's heads, rescue Seeta from her prison and take her back to Rāma. If I do not throw away the crowned heads of Rāvana before the very eyes of the Devas and Rākshasās (who did not try to save Seeta), what more loyal deed is there for me to do? If people were to say that a monkey which came in search of Seeta made the ten heads of Rāvana roll in ten directions while the women who were by his side ran into the palace out of fear, is it an ordinary compliment for me? I have been carrying the burden of my life hoping to meet this Rāvana with his sword-like

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teeth. If I just go back after telling him a few words, I will deserve only censure. Instead, even if I get killed in a fight with Rāvana, will I earn anything except fame?" *As Hanuman was about to sever the serpents that had bound him and pounce on Rāvana like a lion, he justly realised, "It is an act that I should avoid. The strength possessed by Rāvana is not ordinary. His victories so far clearly show that he cannot be defeated by others. Except Rāma, none else can vanquish this very embodiment of nocturnal darkness. Neither can I defeat Rāvana, nor can he conquer me. An indecisive fight for a number of days will not only negate Rāma's oath that he would roll the ten heads of Rāvana on the ground, but also result in the death of Seeta who has proclaimed (in the name of Rāma) that she will retain her life for just one month from now. Therefore, to desist from fighting Rāvana and to act only as a good messenger of Rāma is the right thing to do."*

Hanuman approached the throne where Rāvana was seated in the midst of women whose eyes were like sharp swords. Pointing to Hanuman, Indrajit told Rāvana with folded hands, "The one here in the form of a monkey is bold, and possesses the bravery of Siva and Mahāvishnu." The Sparks of fire that flashed from Rāvana's angry eyes, singed the hair on Hanuman's body. *The heat and smoke that emanated from the mighty breath of Rāvana bound him once again like the serpents around his body.* Making the Devas surrounding him shiver, furious Rāvana (who had consumed their entire fame) asked Hanuman, "Who are you? Why did you come here? Are you Mahāvishnu or Devendra or Siva or Brahma or the thousand-hooded Ādisesha? Hiding your real form, you seem to have come here for your own destruction. Are you Lord Muruga or Yama? Are you a treacherous fiend created by the yāgas of sages and sent here, or a celestial being sent by Lord Brahma to destroy the whole of Lanka? Who among these are you? Obey my orders and tell me everything clearly." Hanuman replied, " I am not any of them, nor have I come here at the behest of any of those described by you. *I am the messenger of a brave archer, who has handsome lotus eyes. If you want to know who that archer is, I will tell you. He is one who has appeared in this world to perform deeds which cannot even be conceived by the Trinity of Gods or the Devas or the sages. He has come to destroy with one arrow all the strength that you have accumulated through your penance and the boons obtained from celestials. He is not a Deva or a Rākshasa or a celestial in charge of the eight directions. Neither is he the Trinity of Gods. He is the son of a king who had ruled the entire world. This great archer is one who can confer all the boons that can be obtained through yāgas and*

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great penances. That is because He is the root, the susbtance and the very form of dharma extolled by the eternal Védas. Know the reason why He was born as the son of a king! He has arrived today to save the Devas, like the great Ādimoolam who appeared once to save Gajendra, the elephant, from the grip of a crocodile. He has no beginning, middle or end. He has no past, present or future. Leaving His age-old banyan leaf, lotus flower and Mount Kailas, He has come to Ayōdhya with a bow in His hand, without His Trident, Disc or Conch. This Supreme Being, who terminates the cycle of rebirth for all those who worship His golden feet, is born to make the people of this world pursue dharma and uphold the Védas. After destroying the wicked and relieving the distress of the virtuous, He will go back to his original place. He is Rāma. I am his servant. My name is Hanuman. I have come alone as the messenger of Vali's son, Angada, who is heading the army that has come southwards in search of Seeta."

Listening to Hanuman, Rāvana laughed, with his teeth flashing like lightning coming out of dark clouds. He asked Hanuman, "O messenger of Vāli's son, how is that strong Vāli? Is he ruling well?" Hanuman replied, "Do not fear! Vāli has left this world. He will not come back. He was slain by a deadly arrow that was shot by Rāma. Our king now is Sugreeva, the son of Soorya." When Rāvana wanted to know why Vāli was killed and the circumstances that prompted Angada to go in search of Seeta, Hanuman continued, "The crimson-eyed Rāma who came in search of Seeta, and my king, Sugreeva, became close friends. Sugreeva requested Rāma to relieve him of the hardship caused by Vāli. Rāma gave back the kingdom to Sugreeva along with his wife, Urumai after killing Vāli. Rāma waited for four months with Sugreeva, and asked us to go in search of Seeta after a huge vānara army had rallied for Rāma's sake. That is how I am here." Rāvana ridiculed Hanuman and said, "How can your 'fame' be destroyed when you vānaras have become the slaves of Rāma who murdered Vāli, the leader of your very race! After getting his elder brother killed, Sugreeva has become affectionate towards Rāma the killer! *Why did you have to fight here after having arrived as a messenger? Tell me everything without any fear. I will not kill you, for you have come as an envoy."* Hanuman carefully considered what Rāvana said. Feeling that it was good to offer Rāvana sound advice based on dharma, noble Hanuman told him, "I have come here to convey to you the words of Sugreeva. I shall proceed, if you will take those proper words in the right spirit. Though you have ruined your life needlessly by doing wicked deeds and inviting your own destruction, you can still protect your life, provided you listen to my useful words!

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"The moment you caused agony to the chaste Seeta who is purer than even fire, you started losing the merit that you had once acquired by controlling your five senses and doing penance. You have already lost your greatness as a result of vanquishing the enlightened Devas. A portion of the remaining greatness stands forfeited by you today. By tomorrow, owing to your fate, you will be losing whatever greatness is left in you. You have not realised the truth that sin can never destroy virtue. The purity you achieved through your penance, is going to be wiped out by the disease of wanting to acquire Seeta, a pure lady! Everyone who has transgressed dharma has only fallen lower and lower. Among those that have given up virtue by surrendering to lust, who is there who has not escaped destruction? Noble ones consider that there is no darkness in this world other than the quest of wealth and lust; that only charity, compassion and desisting from lust, are pathways to enlightenment. If, as a result of lust, one seeks another's wife, and subjects himself to the ridicule of others, can that despicable act ever be considered noble? Among all the Rākshasās who lived and died in this huge world, there was none who possessed your knowledge and sense of justice. How can you, who had all along been following Védic dharma cross its very boundary and commit sinful deeds? *The sight of one whose nose is cut off, is more beautiful than the life of one who is alive even after being spurned by a woman. Can innumerable strong hands and a thousand heads save you when you slip from dharma? They will all end up as one hundred pieces of cloth that get burnt in a raging fire. The moment you forsake dharma, the boon Lord Siva gave you (pleased by the veena music rendered by you), will leave you. Do you really believe that the arrow of Rāma who does not deviate from the Védas, will fail to reach its target?* You had acquired the merits of great sages and the learned. Why do you now indulge in despicable acts that will only bring down your longevity and riches, and will make you the laughing-stock of everyone? All those born in this world, as well as those who have got emancipated from the chain of births and deaths, and even celestials, cannot afford to forget Rāma. This is true. *Sugreeva, the son of Soorya, has therefore asked me to tell you that you must return Seeta and save your kingdom and your race."*

Rāvana who had never known anything other than victory in his life, roared with laughter and said, "It is fine indeed that a monkey living in a mountain should send me words of advice! I am not concerned either with Sugreeva's advice or the prowess of Rāma and Lakshmana. Tell me you fellow! Why did you kill the Rākshasās after entering this huge city as a messenger?" Hanuman replied, "I destroyed the fragrant Asōka grove because no one was there to show you to me! I killed the Rākshasās who came to kill me. I have come here with all modesty, only because I wanted to see you."

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Rāvana whose teeth flashed like lightning became angry and ordered, "Kill this monkey!" Immediately, the 'executioners' approached Hanuman. Vibheeshana, the just, who was in Rāvana's court stopped them and addressed Rāvana with folded hands, *"The overflowing anger that I see in you is not just. O Védic scholar, you are a descendant of Lord Brahma. You have grown to great heights. Even Devendra has agreed to serve you because of the strength of your penance. There may be, in this world, a few kings who have put to death even women. But, is there anyone who has killed a messenger?* If you kill a messenger who comes to the enemy's kingdom bringing the message sent by his master, you are giving room for others to laugh at you. It will be a blot on our race, too. The Trinity of Gods, and the Devas who are inimical to us, will start ridiculing us if we kill this messenger. Even Rāma and Lakshmana sent Soorpanakha here after cutting off only her nose and ears, instead of killing her. If the life of this messenger is taken away, you will prevent him from conveying to them what he has seen here amongst us."

Rāvana told Vibheeshana, "Brother, you have spoken rightly. Though this vānara has committed crimes, it is wrong to kill him." Rāvana then turned to Hanuman and said, "Go from here to Rāma and Lakshmana. Tell them everything and bring them quickly." Later, Rāvana told the Rākshasās in his court, "Destroy the tail of this monkey by setting fire to it. Make him leave our boundary after taking him round the city of Lanka." Indrajit intervened and said, "It is not advisable to set fire to his tail when he is bound by the Brahmāstram. Tie his shoulders with strong ropes." After he was freed from the Brahmāstram, the Rākshasās tied Hanuman with many ropes. *Every rope that was available in Lanka was requisitioned for this purpose. Cradles in homes lost the ropes used for tying them, chariots lost their ropes, horses lost the ropes with which they were tied in stables. Even the elephants lost the ropes with which their feet were bound. All types of ropes and strings seen by the Rākshasās were brought to tie Hanuman and keep him bound. The only strings that survived were the māngalyams of the Rākshasis!* Hanuman thought, "Fortunately, my enemies have freed me from the Brahmāstram. I do not have to transgress dharma. Will I not easily wipe out the glorious deeds of these Rākshasās who have tied me with mere ropes? By setting fire to my tail, are they not asking me to set fire to the whole city of Lanka?" Even though the ropes were no match to the strength of Hanuman, he pretended to be weak and allowed himself to be bound by them. He did not resist when the Rākshasās dragged him. The noble Hanuman was in no hurry to snap the ropes, though he knew how to do it. *He appeared like a yōgi who feigned ignorance.*

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The Rākshasās brought Hanuman through the gateway of Rāvana's palace to an open place. They lost their patience and raised a hue and cry and surrounded him. After completely covering his long tail with cloth, the Rākshasās soaked it in oil and ghee and set fire to it. Their loud roar shook the whole world. The ropes with which Hanuman was bound were held by one hundred thousand Rākshasās on each side. Rākshasās surrounded him like a huge sea. It was impossible to count those who had come to watch the fun. All came out of their homes and shouted, inviting everyone to come and witness the tragedy that had befallen a monkey 'which not only dared to destroy the Asōka grove but also killed the Rākshasās and had the audacity to tell Rāvana of the prowess of those two humans, after secretly conferring with Seeta'. Beating the drums, the Rākshasās thundered as if they were announcing the news about Hanuman even beyond the world! A few of them ran to Seeta and told her what had happened to Hanuman. On hearing this, Seeta perspired, wept, rolled on the ground and was in great agony. Invoking Agni she said, "You are a friend of Vāyu who has a motherly compassion for all lives in this world. Will you not help Hanuman who is being tortured by the Rākshasās? You are a witness to everything that happens in this world. Therefore you know everything. *If I am truly chaste and pure, then please do not burn Hanuman. I worship you and make this appeal." On hearing Seeta's words, Agni became subdued. The effect of Seeta's invocation was such that Agni became cool everywhere — in this world, in the celestial world, and even in the third eye of Lord Siva. The fire that was on the beautiful palm of Brahma, the fire in the oblation pits of yāgas, the heat that came from lightning and thunder in the clouds, the heat of the solar region and even the hot hell from which sinners cannot escape, became cool. Hanuman, whose heart was filled with lasting love for Rāma, suddenly found that even though his huge tail was engulfed by fire it was cool without any heat. He thought deeply and realised with exceptional joy that this was the result of the greatness of the chastity of Janaka's daughter.*

Hanuman, who did not have a full measure of Lanka during the night when he searched for Seeta, was now able to see the whole city because he was dragged through all the streets by the foolish Rākshasās themselves. *Like the hidden sense following the external eyes, Hanuman saw everything clearly.* He felt that the opportune moment to escape from the Rākshasās had come. Immediately, he rose into the sky along with the two hundred thousand Rākshasās who at first appeared like hanging pillars but later fell to the ground. Half of them lost their shoulders and died. With ropes all over his body, Hanuman looked like Garuda flying high with a cluster

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of snakes around him! Like Lord Siva's arrow, which had burnt the whole of Tripura once upon a time, Hanuman burnt the expansive Lanka from all sides. Invoking the name of Rāma several times, Hanuman with his burning tail jumped from house to house like the pralaya thunder and set fire to each of them. Starved of his food from the yāga pits (because of the obstruction by the Rākshasās), Agni held on affectionately to Hanuman's tail and had a hearty 'meal' by consuming and destroying the whole of Lanka with great speed like the all-consuming pralaya fire.

14. THE BURNING OF LANKA

The fierce fire from Hanuman's tail spread into well-protected houses, engulfed mansions (atop which flags flew), embraced huge pillars and walls, and finally destroyed all the houses. The Rākshasās who were caught between the burning houses, ran to and fro like swinging cradles. They all screamed aloud in agony without knowing which way to go. Young Rākshasis were unable to distinguish fire-infested areas from fire-free areas. The reflected light from the red gems which adorned the houses added to their confusion. The smoke that had spread far and wide, screened the whole sky and created such darkness that the Rākshasis of Lanka wept, without any sense of direction. Unable to distinguish the red colour of the raging fire and the red colour of the hair on their own heads, the Rākshasās and Rākshasis, shouted and poured water on one another's heads. *As if released from Rāvana's writ, the subdued fire from the houses of Rākshasās, suddenly acquired its original fierce form, like a yōgi released from māya regaining knowledge!* The smoke went up and spread like the dark-complexioned Mahāvishnu, who, starting as Vāmana, had assumed a mighty form, to measure the world with His foot. With the peeling of their skins due to the raging fire, the dark blue elephants appeared like the white Irāvatam. Buffaloes fell like clouds, into the sea. The huge sparks of fire that went up into the sky burst like thunder and dropped into the sea, making it boil. As a result, all the fishes died. The fire that could swallow everything, melted the gold contained in the mansions. The molten gold flowed into the sea and was converted into big blocks.

The fire was so fierce that it could consume the whole world with the speed of a curse. All the mansions and gardens were completely burnt. Even the ground (made of gold) melted and flowed. The celestial world became dark with huge clouds of smoke. All the lofty chariots sporting flags were burnt along with the wheels embedded with gems. The fire consumed the liquor stored for the treacherous Rākshasās, as if the fire itself was indulging in vices! The fire was so fierce that

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the sea began boiling, and the cool clouds in the sky were converted into steam. Rākshasis caught by the fire ran into the sky. Mistaking the fire on the ground for running water, they fell into it and died. Bees which were sucking nectar from flowers, left the gardens which were engulfed by fire and rushed towards balls of fire elsewhere imagining them to be huge sunflowers and were burnt to death. A few Rākshasis stayed in their burning houses and gave up their lives because they lost their dear husbands, killed by a monkey! With the charring of flowers, the burning of creepers and leaves, and branches reduced to ashes, all the gardens were totally destroyed. *The fire that rose from Lanka went up so high that even the golden city of Amarāvati above the clouds, was completely burnt. The molten gold that came down from the burnt city, appeared like golden roots descending from the sky. The harshness of the fire was such that even the moon melted and shed drops of nectar! A few of the dead Rākshasās on whom the nectar fell, got back their lives! The heat of the fire did not spare the sun, too!*

Heavy smoke surrounded the whole world. The 'galloping' fire burnt the cords binding the horses, the ropes tied around their necks, the poles to which they were tied and their thick manes, and caused the death of those beautiful horses with curved hooves. Rākshasās capable of swallowing even Yama, tried to escape to the celestial world to protect themselves. Unable to breathe, because of the thick smoky fire, they became unconscious, fell into the fire and died. The silken robes of Rākshasis who wore ornaments made of pure gold, caught fire and spread to their upper garments and fragrant black hair. As a result, they fell unconscious. Parrots, along with their cages, fell into the fire and got scorched. When the Rākshasis saw this, the tears from their collyrium-painted eyes fell on their breasts. The fire did not spare the mountainous palaces. The Rākshasis (with their shining flawless golden ornaments) entered the sky and were caught in the midst of dense smoke. With their brightness gone, they resembled painted dolls covered by veils! Like the pralaya fire drying up the sea and roasting the fishes, the raging fire destroyed flowers, groves, aquila trees, fragrant sandalwood trees and the pleasant flawless ubiquitous scent from various other trees. The fierce flames of fire, flashing like lightning, swallowed the city of Lanka and began to spread in all directions and even to far-off places. *The fire reached and burnt the branches of the karpaga and other trees, making it impossible to distinguish one from the other.*

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White moistureless clouds (which were moving in the sky towards the sea to collect more water after discharging their water on mountain peaks) stopped moving due to the thick columns of smoke! The hot smoke that pervaded all the worlds, converted the silvery Mount Kailas into a dark one like other mountains. *White swans loooked like black crows.* The ocean of milk looked like any other ocean. Even the elephants guarding the eight directions could not be distinguished from ordinary elephants. Engulfed by the cruel fire, a few Rākshasās lost their skins. They ran and hid themselves in the sea. The red hair (of the Rākshasās and Rākshasis) spreading out on the tidal sea made it appear red! *With a child on the hip and a child held by its hand and another child weeping and following, Rākshasis fell into the sea. Bows, vēls, spears and other weapons in the armoury were burnt like firewood and became a mass of red hot steel, like the shining sun. They appeared like sages seeking their good old lofty state.* Many fierce elephants with face-plates ran amuck discarding the pillars to which they were chained. They shrieked and trumpeted aloud beating their backs with their tails and lifting their curved trunks. *Dreading to fly over the hot smoky fire, birds dipped down into the fierce dark sea, thereby taking refuge in a merciless deceiver, because these birds were swallowed by the confused fishes.* The raging fire absorbed all the water stored in tanks throughout the city of Lanka, and burnt all the trees and huge mountains. *Like the pralaya fire that would burn even the Meru, the engulfing fire destroyed the whole city of Lanka and finally entered the palace of Rāvana.*

All the women (including the celestials) who were in Rāvana's palace, panicked and ran amuck not knowing where they were going. The scene was exactly like the one when Rāvana took over the citadel of the Devas. All the camphor and other fragrant substances like sandalwood inside the palace were burnt. Appearing like huge clouds, the smoke pervaded the air and imparted an exquisite fragrance to the locks of the women in heaven. *The omnipresent fire destroyed the seven floors of Rāvana's golden palace, in the same manner as the seven worlds got destroyed during pralaya.* The entire palace was reduced to one burning mass which looked like another golden Meru in the south. *Without losing time, Rāvana got into his flying chariot along with his favourite women and escaped from the raging fire.* Rākshasās with supernatural powers, also jumped out of the city. As the city of Lanka was not endowed with such unique powers, it was burnt and destroyed. A shocked Rāvana asked his companions, "Has the final day of dissolution arrived to

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annihilate all the fourteen worlds with fire? What other reason is there for the burning of the city of Lanka?" Bereaved Rākshasās who had lost their relatives as well as all their possessions, told Rāvana with folded hands, "O King! All this was done because we set fire to that monkey's tail which was longer than even the waves of the ocean." Rāvana boiled with anger when he heard this. He said derisively, "Today the city of Lanka is burning because of the strength of an ordinary monkey. Red fire has effortlessly consumed this city which is belching smoke. The Devas will ridicule us if they see this sight. Our fighting capabilities are great indeed!" Rāvana contemptuously laughed at everyone and commanded the Rākshasa leaders to bring Agni (who was responsible for this devastation) before him and ordered that the 'monkey' that had wrought all this havoc be caught before it escaped.

Obeying Rāvana's orders, several angry Rākshasa heroes left the place along with archers, charioteers and senior members of his court. They were followed by seven warriors to fight Hanuman. On sighting him, all of them shouted, "Catch him!" and "Beat him!" The Rākshasās who appeared like dark clouds, tried to encircle him with their arms, legs and spears. Hanuman in turn, encircled all the Rākshasās with his burning tail. Later, he tore up a tree and smashed the Rākshasās with it, making them lose their weapons *as well as their days!* The blood that flowed from them became a river and extinguished the red fire. Several leonine heroes opposed him. Appearing three times more ferocious than Yama, Hanuman the son of Vāyu, killed all who faced him. Fifty thousand dark, cloud-like mighty Rākshasās were killed. The rest of them were drowned. Hanuman dipped his tail into the sea. Even the sea began to boil due to the heat, killing the Rākshasās who had jumped into it. Heroes who rode chariots, exhibiting their 'invincible' skill in archery, surrounded Hanuman and attacked him. They, too, were destroyed by him. *The Vidhyādharas who were flying in the air, talking amongst themselves said, "The fire that was set off by Hanuman did not burn the interior or the exterior of the garden (full of birds) occupied by Seeta!" Listening to their words, the talented Hanuman was relieved that he had escaped from the ignominy of committing a great sin!* He jumped into the Asōka grove and worshipped the sacred feet of Seeta. On sighting Hanuman, her body which was burning with heat became cool. The great warrior, Hanuman, told Seeta, "Why words? My salutations to you," and took leave of her. The shining Agni, too, disappeared, fearing that the deceitful Rākshasās might catch him!

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15. WORSHIPPING THE SACRED FEET

Hoping to leave Lanka soon, Hanuman moved like the sun and reached the peak of a huge mountain. Growing in size and appearing like Mahāvishnu who had swallowed the entire world, he rose into the sky after worshipping the sacred feet of Rāma. On his way, Hanuman told the mountain Mainākam about all that had taken place in Lanka, rose in a moment, and jumped onto the honey-shedding Mahendra mountain where the vānaras were eagerly awaiting his arrival. Angada and other vānara heroes who had begun to get worried became happy at once, like fledgelings sighting their mother returning to the nest. Hanuman's lustrous form told them that his mission had been successful and made them swell with pride. On seeing Hanuman, a few of the vānaras shed tears of joy, a few roared standing in front of him, a few prostrated themselves before him, some of them danced happily, some encircled him, a few of them touched him, while a few others lifted him. Some of the vānaras told him, "O great Hanuman, your shining face tells us that you have seen Seeta. We have already collected and preserved vegetables and honey for you to eat. Please refresh yourself with them." Saying so, they brought all types of eatables. Looking at the countless number of injuries *(like the countless number of days that had passed in this world)* inflicted on his legs, chest, shoulders, head and hands, by swords, véls and arrows, the vānaras became sad and sighed heavily as though they were about to give up their lives.

Hanuman first made obeisance to Angada and then prostrated himself before Jāmbavan the king of the bears. Wishing all others appropriately and then seating himself, Hanuman told the vānaras who were gathered there, "Seeta, the consort of Rāma, the Lord of the universe, has sent her good wishes to all of you here." Instantly, the vānaras stood up with folded hands, worshipped Seeta, and extolled her. Standing erect with pride, they said, "O mighty Hanuman! Please narrate in detail all that happened from the time you left for Lanka till your return." Hanuman, described the greatness of Seeta's chastity and the power of her penance. *Without mentioning either his victorious fight over the Rākshasās or details of the burning of Lanka, Hanuman stopped with the narration of his having received the sacred jewel, Choodāmani, from Seeta. The vānaras replied, "Even if you do not tell us everything, the injuries on your body tell us of your fight in Lanka. Your return bears testimony to your victory in the fight. The columns of smoke seen above that city tell us of your having burnt Lanka, and Seeta not returning with you reveals the might of the enemies. What else is there*

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for us to learn from you? Our immediate task is to go to Rāma and relieve him of his anguish. You have saved us, your beloved ones, from death. The time stipulated for finding out the whereabouts of Seeta is over long ago. The vānara army that has been waiting for your arrival has suffered a great deal and has lost its capacity to move fast. Please go immediately and assuage the sorrow of Rāma." Hanuman agreed with the vānaras and moved even before their army started.

After having narrated Hanuman's deeds (which even Lord Siva would not have been able to accomplish), let us now unfold all that happened to Rāma. The crimson-eyed Rāma who was at the black Prasravana mountain, was being constantly consoled by Sugreeva with words of encouragement. Rāma was considerably upset and felt his very life ebb away when he heard that Seeta could not be found by the vānaras who had gone to the north, east and west. Only thinking of the efficient and steadfast Hanuman, did Rāma continue to exist! Steeped in a sea of sorrow, he told Sugreeva, "We have failed in the task we undertook. Hanuman and the rest who went south in search of Seeta, have not yet returned. I wonder whether they have died, or anything else has happened to them. Could it be that these vānaras have given up their lives out of sorrow, afraid to convey to us the news of Seeta's death? Or, are they still searching for Seeta? Have the vānaras gone to heaven, killed by the sorcery of the deceitful Rākshasās? Or, have the Rākshasās chained and kept them in a huge harsh prison? As the stipulated time is over, is it possible that out of fear of meeting us empty-handed, Hanuman and the rest have taken to penance discarding both happiness and sorrow? O Sugreeva, tell me what could have actually happened." As Rāma was talking to Sugreeva, Hanuman was sighted by them as though they saw the sun in the southern direction. Rāma, the possessor of mighty hands which had gifted showers of gold, affectionately looked at Hanuman. *But, Hanuman after reaching Rāma, did not bow to Rāma's sacred feet. Instead, he lifted both his hands above his head, and prostrated himself in the direction of Seeta who had left her lotus abode and come to the earth.* Rāma (who could discern everything from the very signs that he observed) realised from astute Hanuman's actions that he had seen Seeta and she was safe, and her chastity, too, had been well preserved. Hanuman's actions enabled Rāma to measure the state of Seeta. Rāma's shoulders were seen to swell with happiness. Tears of joy flowed from his lotus eyes. He was rid of his acute sorrow, while his love for Seeta grew in intensity.

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Hanuman said to Rāma, "I saw Seeta, a jewel of chastity, in the southern city of Lanka surrounded by the tidal sea, O Lord of the world! Please shed your concern as well as your long-standing sorrow. My Goddess Seeta has proved she is worthy of being your wife, the daughter-in-law of Dasaratha and the daughter of Janaka. *Just as there is nothing that is equal to gold except gold, Seeta stands out, not comparable with anyone other than her own self, by exhibiting the quality of patience. She has given to you the distinction of being an incomparable husband and to me the distinction of becoming an incomparable servant.* My mother (Seeta) has brought great fame and credit to your dynasty. She has obtained for herself exceptional distinction and honour. For the crime of tormenting her and separating her from you, she has offered Rāvana's clan to Yama and helped the celestial race to survive. She has brought me and my vānara race universal praise. What more is there for her to do? *O hero possessing a mighty bow, I did not see in that Lanka surrounded by the sea, a mere Seeta who had undertaken a vow of chastity. What I actually saw there was the joyous dancing of noble birth, great patience, and the very personification of chastity combined. You were constantly seen in the eyes of Seeta. You were found in all her thoughts and in every word she uttered.* You were present even in the never-healing wounds inflicted on her breasts by the floral arrows of Manmatha. Is it therefore proper to say that Seeta and you have been separated?

"O Lord, inside Lanka surrounded by the sea, in a hut made by your brother Lakshmana, in the midst of a lofty bright golden karpaga garden (where mornings and evenings look alike), I saw Seeta, a woman created as a result of penance done by penance! Brahma had cursed Rāvana that he would break into pieces and die if he ever touched an unwilling woman. Rāvana, who was aware of this curse, did not dare to touch the sacred body of the chaste Seeta, and therefore, had taken her away along with the earth and the hut in which she dwelt. That the world created by Lord Brahma is still intact without going to pieces, that the thousand hoods of the divine serpent, Ādisesha, have not yet been torn into shreds, that the sea has not crossed its boundaries and wiped out the world, that the celestial objects like the sun, the moon and the stars have not fallen from the sky, that the truths enunciated in the great scriptures known as the Védas have not been falsified, are all ample proof for you that Seeta has not been touched by Rāvana. Owing to the greatness of her chastity, sorrowing Seeta, who has been separated from you, has attained the pinnacle of glory and has made the wives of celestials also worthy of worship! As a result, the consort of Lord Siva is no longer on

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His left side. She now occupies His head! The consort of Lord Māhavishnu is no longer in His bosom. She now occupies His thousand crowns.

"I went round the whole of Lanka in search of Seeta and entered Rāvana's palace where I saw women decorated with golden ear-rings. *Finally, I reached the Asoka grove and saw Goddess Seeta in the midst of a sea of tears.* Seeta was closely guarded by innumerable Rākshasis who would frighten even a crowd of fiends. Only through the strength of her love for you, was she able to get rid of her fear. *She looked like the feminine form of the noble quality of compassion, caught inside a cruel prison.* O Lord, while I was waiting for an opportune moment to make obeisance to her, Rāvana came with a garland around his neck and a spear in his hand and begged her to accept his love. Seeta chided him with harsh words. The infuriated Rāvana tried to kill her. Seeta was, however, protected by her chastity, your benevolence, and pure dharma. Rāvana left the place after asking the Rākshasis to 'advise Seeta properly'. Finally the Rākshasis were put to sleep by my divine chantings. Just then, Seeta thought of giving up her noble life. She took a creeper and tied one end to the branch of a tree. *When she was about to tie the other end around her exquisite neck, I, who was like a dog, stopped her and prostrated myself at her golden feet, chanting your name.* Like a downpour of rain from the clouds, tears flowed from Seeta's eyes on to her breasts. Even though she feared that I might be yet another deceitful Rākshasa, she told me, 'You appear to be kind to me. By chanting Rāma's name, you have made me discard death which I was about to seek'. After examining all the details mentioned by me and after fully realising that there was no deceit in my mind, Seeta accepted your ring. She looked at it intently and it soon became a life-giving remedy for her, saving her from death. *I saw two things happening within a moment. When Seeta pressed the ring to her bosom, the terrible heat that was in her as a result of her separation from you, melted the sparkling ring. Then it instantly solidified, by the coolness that sprang from her body as a result of the happiness generated in her by the ring.*

"Receiving the ring, Seeta did not utter a word. She did nothing except shed torrential tears of joy. She bathed the ring (because it had come to the place of the deceitful Rākshasās) in a thousand pots of her sacred tears! Her wasted body appeared more robust. Her eyes looked intently at the ring without blinking, though she was aghast. She sighed deeply. I, your loyal servant, narrated to Seeta in an appropriate manner, all that had happened after her separation from you. I told her that so much time was lost because the place of her imprisonment was not known.

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I also described to her the manner in which you have been suffering owing to your separation from her. *Only after listening to everything I said, did she get back her breath. After learning from me of all the happenings here, Seeta told me of all the happenings there. She said, 'I will be alive only for a month more. After that I will give up my life', and made obeisance to your sacred feet.* Thereafter, she took out the Choodāmani (which had been tied in a cloth), and placed it in my hand with great joy. Pray see this jewel with your lotus eyes." The great Hanuman (whose fame will last as long as all the yugas will last) gave the jewel to Rāma. The moment Rāma saw the jewel, the weakness and the heat that had taken possession of him owing to his growing love for Seeta, disappeared. *The sight of the Choodāmani for Rāma, was like the sight of the sacred hand of Seeta held by his own handsome hand before the sacred fire, at the time of their wedding.* His shoulders and chest swelled and twitched in excitement and his hair stood on end. His handsome mouth folded. His body swelled, with his life breath fluctuating. *Who could understand the feelings that Rāma went through at that time?*

Rāma asked Sugreeva how he could delay and stay there even after Seeta had been found. Sugreeva, the possessor of pillar-like arms, immediately got up and ordered, "Let our fierce army be ready before I utter the syllable 'Aye'. *The army of seventy vellam vānaras who never disobeyed the orders of Sugreeva, began moving rapidly in the southern direction like the waves of the sea coming out of their bounds. The vānara heroes who moved fast, were able to cross the long distance effortlessly listening to Hanuman's narration of the prowess and greatness of the dark Rākshasa heroes firmly protecting Lanka on the mountain.* Along with the vānaras, their leader Sugreeva also proceeded, accompanied by the righteous Rāma and his brother, Lakshmana. The entire vānara army marched through mountains full of huge gardens. Finally on the twelfth day they sighted the southern ocean.

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YUDDHA KĀNDAM

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1. THE SIGHT OF THE SEA

The army of vānaras numbering seventy vellams halted at the southern seashore, pushing down the mountains and the southern land by their sheer weight and forcing the indestructible Meru and the surrounding earth go up and touch the northern sky! Ever since his separation from Seeta, Rāma had not slept even when the lotuses (his kin) had folded their petals and slept! With joy he now saw the vast army moving on the shores of the sea. *Pushed by the 'thenral' (southern breeze), the waves of the sea threw up white foam resembling fresh flowers. These waves appeared to beat and shake the pearl-white bed and lay it afresh, as if to welcome Lord Tirumāl who had left His bed and was now returning to rest on it! The droplets of water scattered around by the waves blown by the 'thenral' came like sparks from an anvil and burnt Rāma's handsome shoulders because Seeta was immersed in a sea of sorrow. Embracing the colourful waves of the cruel and noisy sea, which seemed to take no pity on the pining Rāma, the tender 'thenral' blew after spreading the fragrant pollen dust of punnai flowers.*

The coral reefs that branched out like creepers on the sea, resembled the beautiful mouth of chaste Seeta and posed as Yama to the mighty-shouldered Rāma withering in sorrow. He wondered whether the white pearls (scattered on the seashore) resembling the lustrous teeth of Seeta, were in league with the heartless Rākshasās and wanted to kill him who had become emaciated with sorrow because he was unable to reach her though she was not far off, as his self-respect protected by his heroic bow did not allow him to go to her till he had destroyed his enemies. The rolling waves dashing against the shores appeared to be shedding tears for Seeta and questioning the propriety of allowing her to suffer in loneliness among the Rākshasās. As if to express their resentment, the waves, spreading out their 'tidal' hands, were full of pearl-like tears. Falling at the feet of Rāma, they prayed to him to end her solitude! The sea seemed to smear the cool white foam on his body to allay the heat caused by his sad separation from her. Full of roaring waves hitting the shore, the sea also appeared to happily welcome Rāma, who, with a fierce bow, had furiously come to wipe away the sorrow of koel-like Seeta and the sufferings of the Devas. With his agony, his self-respect and his love for Seeta now seven times greater than the ocean, Rāma reached the southern sea, wondering what the future held for him! Let us hereafter narrate the happenings in Lanka.

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2. RĀVANA CONFERS WITH HIS MINISTERS

Along with Lord Brahma, the divine architect Mayan had entered the fine city of Lanka and beautified it in a moment as ordered by Rāvana; and, to the wonder of the Devas, had made the city more graceful and attractive than all the cities in the three worlds! Rāvana surveyed the gem-studded golden city of Lanka and felt it was more beautiful than Amarāvati the celestial capital. Mayan had rebuilt Lanka with the architectural nuances suggested by the four-headed Brahma for whom the act of re-creation, time and again, was but an ordinary act! Rāvana overcame his anger and was happy that the rebuilt city of Lanka was even more magnificent than before. After taking a long look at the whole city and presenting many precious gifts to Mayan, Rāvana worshipped Brahma and bade Him farewell.

In the court which had thousands of ruby-studded pillars, seated on a throne which appeared to be borne by lions, Rāvana was thinking deeply about the future plan of action. The garlands he wore swayed with the breeze from the chowries waved by celestial women. He was encircled by innumerable relatives, expert advisers and army chiefs. Wanting to hold confidential high-level consultations, Rāvana ordered the ascetics, the Devas, the Vidyādharas and others, including the Rākshasis and youngsters, to leave the assembly. He prevented the entry of even bees and air. Except persons whom he knew well, close relatives, good-natured people, eminent scholars and ministers, Rāvana sent the rest away. He posted valiant warriors, capable of crushing anyone in the world with their hands, at all the gates. Even swift-moving birds and, animals did not dare to move and stood like pictures! Peeved that both his pride and his city, had been destroyed by a monkey, Rāvana asked, "Could there have been anything more disgraceful than this?" He chided everyone for the low depths to which his power and prowess had sunk. He ridiculed the 'calmness' of his army and the 'rule' of his land. *Addressing his ministers, he said, "A monkey made Agni destroy this city of Lanka, a city which had all along sported a victorious flag. My kin and friends have died as a result, and shame pervades every place. Only my body continues to remain on the throne. Blood flows like a fountain from the wells, instead of water. The fire in the city is not yet extinguished. The tresses of women which used to emit the fragrance of musk and aquila, now emit only the stench of singed hair. We still eat, dress, and enjoy the pleasures of life! Though we have not done anything great, we should have at least heard of the death of the monkey that came and fought here.*

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Plunged into an ocean of infamy, we are (though born in this world) as good as not born. What else have we achieved?"

Aggrieved by the words of Rāvana, the commander of the army stood up, made obeisance and said, "You are a wise king. It was unbecoming of a hero like you to have sneakily snatched Seeta with her lustrous face. I told you earlier that it was an act of cowardice, but you ignored my advice. You now seem to fear that your sovereignty has come to an end because you have not slain those who cut off the nose of your sister and killed Khara and other warriors. Will any king who protects the world tolerate those who deserve punishment? Capable of crushing the might of all foes, how can you yield to them? You became the head of the three worlds by destroying the courage and prowess of the furious Devas and Asuras, and not by being lenient. We should have slain our enemies earlier. Instead, we have been sitting in Lanka, merrily enjoying life. Why speak of monkeys? We will not be able to save ourselves even if humble gnats come and attack us. *Therefore follow the monkey, kill those who sent it, and wipe out the humiliation we suffered. If we merely show our disgust through words, and stay put, our might will go down."* Endorsing the words of the army commander, mountain-like mighty-shouldered Mahōdaran with flaming eyes said, "O mighty leader, the Devas (our powerful enemies) were subdued by you. Strong Asuras lost their pride and even the universally worshipped Trinity of Gods, unable to stand before you, have disappeared. *Lord Yama, who seizes lives ruthlessly, considers you his Yama.* He has been carrying out your commands, having lost to you in battle. What greater eminence can there be for you beyond this? You lifted the silvery Mount Kailas along with Lord Siva, up to the sky, and thereafter you pleased Him with your sweet music. Why do you belittle the strength of your own sturdy shoulders (augmented by our strength) before the might of the shoulders of a mere monkey living among the branches of a tree? Is there anyone on this earth and in the sky and in all the worlds, who can escape your surveillance? If you command me, I will destroy all the monkeys, consume the lives of those men who are considered invincible, and eliminate your enemies." *Asking Rāvana to ignore Mahōdaran, Vajradantan with eyes ejecting fresh blood, said, "All that you need to do now is to order us to go at once and rub those men and monkeys on the ground, and eat them.* You need not have any doubt about our capacity. Please do not waste your time in consultations, and do not be anxious either. I have defeated all foes who refused to obey your commands in whichever world they lived and I have enslaved every one of them. Why do you still

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refrain from entrusting me with the task of destroying your tormentors? Is it because of any fault in me?"

Silencing Vajradantan, the strong Dunmukhan looked at Rāvana, paid obeisance to him and said, "O Rāvana, it is unbecoming of you to behave like a small being. The Devas and the elephants in the eight directions are powerless before you. Even Mount Kailas is no match for your might. With such great strength at your command, if you feel that men and monkeys are mightier, the strength possessed by you is strange indeed. Analysing the future like a neutral, is a despicable act of cowards. Merely because we love our lives and fear that our enemies are stronger than us, can we go into hiding? *O king, men, monkeys and other beings have been created for us to eat. If we are to show signs of fear before these edible objects, who are there 'bolder' than us 'mighty' Rākshasās? It is true that heroic acts like coming to Lanka, setting fire to the entire city and killing those who offered resistance, have all been done by a solitary monkey. Is it difficult for the Rākshasās to cross the sea and get at this monkey?* There are only a few who have come to Lanka and seen your palace, the fortresses, your might, and the strength and valour of your army. No one, however, has gone back alive after confronting all these. If we want to achieve victory, the only thing we should do now is to go to Rāma and Lakshmana and slay them."

Silencing Dunmukhan with a gesture, the strong Māpakkan told Rāvana, "It does not do us any credit to conduct a secret high-level consultation, and worry ourselves over the activities of a monkey. It is true that when the monkey entered our city, some of our weak warriors, in their maiden confrontation, lost their lives in a close fight. For that simple reason, should we presume that all our prowess and might has disappeared along with those dead warriors, and imagine that the strength of the mighty Rākshasās has been consigned along with the city of Lanka, to the flames of the fire kindled by a monkey? The person who sent the monkey is man whom we usually treat with contempt. *If the Rākshasa heroes are to be afraid of this monkey, what will not happen in future?"* Māpakkan whose eyes would become fiery red on sighting a foe, ridiculed the frequent references by successive speakers to the prowess of the enemy. He added, "Stop these discussions held in despair. Annihilate all men and monkeys by killing and eating them. Do not think of anything till then." Another commander called Pisāsan looking as furious as fire, said out of disgust, "The king wants to know what should be done for the shameful burning of Lanka. We should simply shed our lives in all the eight directions considering the ignominy that has

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befallen us." A commander, known as Sooryasatru declared, "If your majesty is to feel aggrieved at the deed of a monkey, and if discussions are to be held about it and the two men who incited the monkey, then it would amount to considering men superior to us." *A Rākshasa who was an enemy of yāgas said, "There can be nothing worse than talking about humans for lowering the dignity, status, prowess and skill of mighty Rākshasās like us who have ruled the world."* Dhoomirātchan, another Rākshasa, said, "We will be laughed at even if, harmed by Lord Siva, we go to war with Him! Now, if we are to wage war on an army of men and monkeys on the plea that we have been harmed by them, what purpose will be served? It would be more appropriate, if *they* come and fight with us." Following this, many other Rākshasās who were as venomous as snakes, expressed their views endorsing the words of Dhoomirātchan.

Kumbhakarna, Rāvana's younger brother, intervened and asked everyone to refrain from talking. He said that they were just prattling. Stepping forward from the gathering of ferocious and mighty Rākshasās, he approached Rāvana and told him, "If, as my brother, you will bear with me, I will tell you what is good for you. In this dynasty descended from Lord Brahma, you are the only matchless one. *You have acquired the knowledge of Sāma Véda with its thousand branches. But now you are attracted by the red colour of fire and have developed a liking for it, unaware that it will burn you.* Further, you are in agony because of the fire that engulfed the city of Lanka full of paintings. Is it just and fair that you should seek another man's wife, a woman who hails from a noble family, and imprison her? Our kingdom is now doomed by the curse of the world. Can there be a greater sin than your despicable act? You are ashamed that the beautiful city of Lanka is destroyed. Your beloved wives approach you with love, constantly displaying a smile. But you ignore them and fall again and again at the feet of another man's wife and one who spurns you. Do these acts bring you fame? *Seeta was living with a man, leading an ascetic life. Disregarding royal ethics, you sinfully, cruelly and mercilessly imprisoned her. On that very day, the glorious name of our Rākshasa dynasty stood annihilated. Is it wise to think of attaining fame through a despicable act? We keep blemishless wives of others in prison and expect in return flawless honour. Even while we talk eloquently of valour and bravery, we develop lust, and then we fear men who are weak. Wonderful indeed is our prowess! You have not acted as great ones do. You have brought disgrace on our family.* If we now return Seeta to Rāma, we will be considered weaklings. If instead, we are killed in war by these men it will bring us honour. We will then be free from blemish. In a forest full of trees, Rāma with the strength of his bow, killed Khara and his

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fourteen thousand warriors, single-handed. He also slew the Rākshasās who tried to harm the sages performing yāgas. *Perhaps the process of weeding is not complete. What remains to be removed is only our 'might'!* Though it is certain that Rāma and Lakshmana will ultimately win, if we fail to reach them and attack them, the Devas and all the seven worlds will join them. We should cross the big ocean and annihilate those men and monkeys before they move to another place."

Rāvana looked at Kumbhakarna and said, "Well said, my brother! That is exactly what I thought. It would be disgraceful for us to ponder over this any longer. Let us destroy our enemies and return. Instruct our armies to proceed today." Immediately, Rāvana's son Indrajit rose. He laughed and said, "If you are to lead the army yourself and defeat these small men, my valour will be ridiculed. There are many outstanding commanders here in our army, blessed with powerful arms and weapons granted by Lord Siva and Lord Brahma. Will not these commanders also be discredited along with me? It is not proper therefore that you should lead the army. *Even if all the three worlds along with furious Lord Siva were to oppose you, if I do not achieve victory for you, then you are not my father, nor am I your real son.* O furious king, today you will see the massacre of monkeys, the world looking like a battlefield with many headless trunks rolling down to the earth causing grave concern to the people, and Seeta undergoing great misery, arousing the pity of onlookers. You will also see me bring the heads of these two humans who are our foes. The monkeys, with their faces drawn, will flee in terror, their mouths torn by the powerful arrows flowing from my thunderous bow. You will soon be experiencing such a victory. *Ridiculous indeed would be our prowess, if these despicable men supported by hunchbacked monkeys were to vanquish us without the help of elephants, chariots or cavalry. I will not return till I have annihilated all the men and monkeys without allowing a single one to escape.* Only after I transform and destabilise the big world, the wide sky and the all-pervading air and water, overnight, will I return."

Indrajit paid obeisance to Rāvana and sought his permission to leave. Just then, Vibheeshana (another brother of Rāvana) who could realise the greatness of those who have vanquished vices, addressed Indrajit, "You seem to think that it is proper only to say what is suitable for the present. You talk as if you possess wisdom, having mastered all knowledge. You are an ignorant youth incapable of knowing the future. Because you are young, you are unaware of royal justice. *Your talk is incoherent, like a picture drawn by a thoughtless blind person.* You have no place amidst mature

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statesmen. Apart from the Devas who are traditionally virtuous, do think of the several sinful Rākshasās who became Devas by doing noble deeds. Did they become so by uttering lies, or by deceit, or through their physical strength. Even your prowess was entirely due to the boons granted by the celestials for the yāgas performed by you. Those who have committed sins by subjugating the Trinity of Gods and inflicting harm on the virtuous, have only sought their own end. None among them have prospered. Countless are those (even among the sages and the Devas) who gave up immoral acts and reached heaven. *Your foolish speech was born of immaturity."*

Vibheeshana then looked at Rāvana and said, "If you listen to my words, without slighting me, I will explain things clearly to you. *You are my father. You are my mother as well. You are my elder brother. You are my penance and the God whom I worship. You are everything to me.* Only because I feel pained that you are about to lose a sovereignty equal to that of Devendra's, am I prompted to say a few words. O great one with rare prowess, I am neither a scholar nor do I know in detail the present happenings. I dare not evince interest in your ministerial machinations. After listening to my words fully, you are at liberty to show your anger if you think I am wrong. *The whole city of Lanka as well as your royal writ were burnt only by the chastity of the mother of the world, Jānaki, and not by the mischief of a monkey.* If you ponder well you will realise that apart from the craving for land, it is only the craving for a woman that makes a person lose his sky-high supremacy. There is an old curse that the great might accrued by the penance performed by the king of Lanka, would be destroyed by a woman. The curse is still on. When Lord Brahma of outstanding qualities appeared before you in response to your great penance, you failed to seek from him the boon to conquer humans. How can you hereafter defeat them? Though you conquered the seven worlds, you were defeated by the thousand-armed Kārtaveeryārjuna. Is it necessary to explain further that you can be vanquished by a man?

"O king with boundless might! Long ago when you lifted the great Mount Kailas, you were cursed by the four-shouldered Nandi. *As a result, you were to be subjected to great harm by big monkeys with tails. We realised this when you were defeated by Vāli.* How can we protect ourselves from the evil effects of the curses of the divine and chaste Védavati who immolated herself? She had sworn to persecute you. Seeta is none other than Védavati, the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi who rose from the ocean of milk. Dasaratha the famous king, wanting to wield his sceptre, entered the celestial realm to fight the Asura king, Campara. Severing his head and dispatching

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him to the heavens, Dasaratha restored the kingdom to Devendra. Kākutstha with his unsheathed sword, riding on the back of Devendra annihilated the Asuras all alone. Brigu won all the kingdoms of the earth and made everyone happy and prosperous. Sagara created the sea, while Bhageerata brought the proud Ganga down to the earth. All these great ones belonged to the Solar dynasty from which Emperor Dasaratha hailed. Fostering virtue, he annihilated the very clan of anyone who uttered lies and all who opposed him. He never slipped in his royal duties. Having granted two boons to Kaikeyi, he could not go back on them. He ultimately lost his life and attained a bliss which even the Devas could not attain. *O my lord, the sons of this Dasaratha are your enemies. They are incomparable. They possess qualities which even sages, Devas, scholars and others cannot assess. It is only because of our fate that they stand before us in human form with all simplicity. These two, Rāma and Lakshmana, have been given the deadly weapons of Lord Siva obtained by Sage Viswāmitra who had once come forward to create all the worlds including that of Lord Brahma.*

"Rāma and Lakshmana are blessed with the unique bow of Lord Tirumāl. From Sage Agastya, they have received the powerful arrow of Lord Siva. Like deadly cobras, when Rāma's arrows come out of their quiver, they lick the world with their 'tongues', they measure the eight directions of the earth, they emit fatal poison and consume only the lives of the wicked who harm scholarly sages. *I wonder if the bows in the hands of Rāma and Lakshmana are trees or bamboos, or the great Meru! They cannot even be moved by anyone else. The strings and the strength of their bows never deteriorate unlike our bows.* The robust chest of Vāli who had once churned the ocean of milk, was shattered by the arrow which had earlier pierced the seven tall, strong trees and destroyed the mountainous heads of the renowned Rākshasās, Khara and Virādha. The exalted sages who received boons, did not have anyone strong enough to protect them. Realising the capabilities of Rāma and Lakshmana and hoping that they would destroy the Rākshasās along with their very roots, these sages met the brothers. *The Devas who used to surrender to you, are no longer afraid of you because they feel that those who have consumed the 'poison' known as 'Jānaki' will soon die and reach hell.* Afraid to tell you this, these Rākshasās here nervously keep awake day and night. The dull faces of the Devas who used to be afraid of us, *were* like the diurnal moon, but now the faces of those Devas *are* bright, like the nocturnal full moon! Fearing us, Yama and other Devas and also sages, had once changed their forms and fled to the ends of the world. Learning that Seeta is held captive in Lanka, they are now certain of the destruction of the

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Rākshasās, and have happily gone back to their heavenly abodes. Bad omens beyond words occur everywhere. Tall horses with strong legs, and mountainous elephants left by our defeated enemies, are today putting forward their right legs and moving towards our houses. The tongues of Rākshasās have become dry. Foxes bigger than fiends fill the city. The hair of Rākshasās and Rākshasis emit a burnt smell. Not a single good omen is visible. Even the Trinity of Gods cannot stand comparison with these men. *O lord, please listen to me carefully. The leaders of the monkeys associated with these two men are none other than our perpetual enemies, the Devas. It is my duty to stress that it is inadvisable to cross their path. To prevent the ebbing of your fame, wealth and rich heritage, and to avoid getting killed along with your kith and kin, please send that divine and chaste Seeta back to Rāma. I have nothing more to say."*

Rāvana became furious. He struck his palm with the clenched fist of his other hand. With his fierce teeth (looking like crescent moons) emitting white lustre from his mouths, with a loud laugh that shook his shoulders and his shining chest full of scars caused by the swords of enemies, he shouted, "You said, you would be uttering unpalatable truths. But you only spoke foolishly. You said these lowly men would vanquish me! Did you say so out of fear, or out of your love for them? You said that I failed to obtain boons to kill these bovine, docile, men. Was it with boons that I drove the mighty elephants carrying the world, or lifted the fire-complexioned Lord Siva along with the silvery mountain? Never! What harm could the angry army of the Devas do to me in the battlefield? Are men any match for me? It is strange that to you, born along with me from the same womb, these men should appear mightier! You do not know what words to speak. The enemies you refer to, have lost to me several times. Not even once could they defeat me. If, as you claim I owe my great strength entirely to the boons secured from the celestials, with whose boon did I defeat Lord Siva and Lord Tirumāl? If the curses of Nandi would make monkeys kill us, what about other innumerable curses against us? What effect have they had on us? Who among the Devas, Siddhas and Vidyādharas, does not hope for our death? What effect has that had on us? *By his great devotion to Lord Siva, Vāli had secured a boon. As a result, he was to get half of the strength of anyone who opposed him. I was not aware of this. Half of my strength went to Vāli when I fought with him. So I was defeated.* Because of this, how can you conclude that all monkeys can defeat me? If Vāli was confronted by Lord Siva or Lord Vishnu, even their strength would have been transferred to him. *The man whom you refer to, was aware of this boon, and that was*

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why, without facing Vāli, this man hid himself and shot the arrow at him. Who else except you would praise the strength of this man (Rāma) who broke Siva's bow which was already defective, and shot his arrow through the seven trees which had holes. Tricked by the hunchbacked Kooni, did he not enter the huge forest after losing his kingdom?" Calling Vibheeshana senseless, Rāvana ordered his chieftans to proceed to war.

Wearing a garland of flowers, and with great love for his brother, Vibheeshana fell at Rāvana's feet and pleaded again, "Knowing well that Lord Tirumāl, goaded by the Devas, has taken birth as a fully-equipped man to kill us, are you planning to fight with him?" Rāvana replied, "You say that Rāma is none other than Lord Tirumāl. If that is so, are you not aware that in several wars in the past, this Tirumāl was defeated by me? What was this man, Rāma, doing all along, when I was continually winning as I wanted? Was this man lying quiet without breathing all these days? When I had held Devendra prisoner, when I broke the tusks of Irāvatam, when I drove away that Tirumāl during His wars with me, and when I defeated the frightened Devas and forced them to run away, was this man you referred to, a mere child? Tell me what made the Trinity of Gods along with Lakshmi, and other Devas, come under my sway enabling me to rule the three worlds? Was it because Tirumāl was absent or was He powerless? Would mighty Tirumāl with a thousand shoulders and innumerable heads, capable of containing this vast fine world beneath His foot, consider His gigantic form too small and take the form of a man fit to be eaten by us? *My arrows have caused scars on the backs of the mighty Nandi and the great Garuda, whom the delirious Siva and Tirumāl would mount and flee on merely hearing my name!"* Rāvana, more cruel than poison, looked at Vibheeshana and said, "You need not accompany me in this furious battle. Do not be scared. Stay in this vast, well-protected city of Lanka." With these words, Rāvana clapped his hands and laughed loudly. *Vibheeshana again implored Rāvana, "O lord, in bygone days, our ancestors, mightier than you, were completely annihiliated along with their kith and kin because of the rage of Lord Tirumāl. Let me narrate to you the episode of Hiranyan. Please listen to me."*

3. THE SLAYING OF HIRANYAN

"Lord Brahma had taught Hiranyan all that was in the Védas. Hiranyan also secured from Brahma by way of boons, everything he had sought and the collective strength of the Trinity of Gods and the five elements, namely earth, water, fire, air and the ethereal space. He had ordered that only his name should be uttered even in

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prayers in all parts of the universe where Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva, did their respective duties of creation, protection and destruction. Hiranyan had such great physical strength that he would hold a tall and sturdy elephant in each of his two hands, and would knock them against each other. He used to walk across the seven unfathomable seas and reach the opposite shores, as if these seas were under the control of his legs. *He would not bathe in the tidal river because it was too small for him, nor in the rain water that carried the fragrance of aquila because it was not cool enough, nor in sea water because it was saltish. He would pierce the universe and bathe in the pure water coming from beyond this world!* He would then go to the serpent world, stay with the serpent girls and eat their sweet food. He would spend his day in the much-lauded world of Devendra. Finally, in the night, he would be in the world of Lord Brahma. Sitting in the celestial chariot, he would arrogate to himself the authority of the moon and also the task of the sun. Staying in his own abode, he would perform the work of the guards of the eight regions, and would sit as an emperor on the peak of the Meru. He would even take over the duties of the five basic elements dominated by Vāyu and Varuna.

"Instead of the divine name of Lord Mahāvishnu, Hiranyan ordered his name to be chanted in all the worlds, as 'Hiranyāya Namaha'. When the sages made offerings to the gods, he would order that the offerings be given to him, and would consume them. The Supreme Trinity of Gods were not able to discharge their respective duties, and gave them up. The sages lost their respectable positions, and even the Devas prayed only at the feet of Hiranyan. The lord of the scriptures, too, recited only the hymn, 'Hiranyāya Namaha' in all the four Védas. Hiranyan chose the Mandara mountain as a club fit for his victorious shoulders. Later, finding it too light, he discarded it as worthless! *The two tall mountains from where the life-giving sun would rise and set, were for Hiranyan mere ear-rings.* Need anything further be said about his prowess? If sturdy Hiranyan set his foot on the ground, Ādisesha with his thousand hoods would become weak unable to bear the weight. If Hiranyan stood up, his head would touch the top of the universe. If he moved from place to place, all the five elements would get destabilised and would move along with him. *The boons that Hiranyan had obtained, safe-guarded him from meeting his death at the hands of beautiful women, strong and sturdy men, and anyone of human or animal origin. Hiranyan would also not die from any weapons seen by the eyes so far, or by the chanting of any hymns conceived by the mind hitherto. He could neither die on the earth nor in the sky. Hiranyan would neither lose his life nor his strength even if the*

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Trinity of Gods tried to kill him. Hiranyan would die neither in water nor in fire, nor by forceful wind, nor by anything on the earth. The curses of the Devas and learned sages would not in the least affect him. He would not die either inside or outside any mansion. He would neither die in the night nor during the day. Even Yama, could not snatch his life. The four Védas, unaffected by the five senses arising out of the five elements, could not kill him. Even if his own father tried to kill him, he would not die. Hiranyan was God to all the worlds. Such was his supremacy!

"Hiranyan had a unique son. The boy was wiser than the wisest. He was the very embodiment of virtues, and nobler than even the Védas. He was the lord of virtues and a unique spiritualist who had realised God. *He showered great love, more abundant than even a mother, on all living beings. His name was Prahlāda.* He had a life-span outlasting the end of the yuga. *Pleased to see his son destined for a noble life, Hiranyan became happy, melted with affection and said, 'O heir to my sceptre, learn from the preceptor, the scriptures indispensable to a sovereign rule'.* Hiranyan then handed his son Prahlāda over to a brahmin of limitless knowledge and commanded him to teach the boy. Consenting to learn the four scriptures, Prahlāda went along with the preceptor. When asked by the preceptor to chant his father's name first, Prahlāda closed his ears with his hands and said, 'O elderly one, what you say is not a good form of worship'. Then he proceeded to utter the name of the real God. Prahlāda, the lord of true knowledge, chanted the divine words 'Om Namō Nārāyanāya', with absolute devotion. With his folded hands raised over his head, with tears flowing from his lotus eyes and all his hair rising with emotion, the knowledgeable Prahlada chanted the name of Nārāyana. The preceptor shuddered and said, 'O accursed one, you have destroyed yourself and also me. You sinner! You have driven us both to face death. How dare you utter a name other than your father's which deserves to be chanted even by the Devas! What have you done?' *Prahlāda said, 'I have elevated myself. I have elevated my father. I have elevated you, my preceptor, and all other beings in this world by chanting the name 'Nārāyana' which is the first name in the age-old scriptures. Please tell me what is wrong with what I have said'.* The preceptor replied, 'Your father Hiranyan is the Supreme lord of all Devas and the Trinity of Gods. Are you a greater scholar than I, a brahmin who is fit to recite the divine name of your father? Do not cause me trouble by mentioning the name of Nārāyana'.

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"Blemishless Prahlāda said, 'I am not aware of any name other than that of the first and foremost Lord! There is nothing more I have to know or learn in this regard. *Lord Nārāyana*, the finality of all things mentioned in the four Védas, has found a place in my heart. There is no greater name than this beloved Lord of mine. If there is anything which I do not know within the four walls of justice, please teach them to me. The name of the Supreme Lord is identified as the ancient and primary God by learned ones who have mastered the Védas and the Upanishads. It is the only name uttered by sages and the Devas. The name *'Nārāyana'* alone is recited by elderly scholars who seek to attain the heavenly abode through yāgas, teachings, spiritual knowledge, and penance. Apart from this, is there anything else that deserves to be chanted? With forests and mountains as their abodes, great and learned ascetics who ultimately attain a place in heaven through penance, consider the pious name of *Nārāyana* superior to all their spiritual attainments. *I am blessed with this great wealth!* Is there anything greater that I can attain? Even those who are not familiar with the Védas will know their contents of their own accord and will become great poets, if they serve the devotees of Lord Tirumāl. Neither I, nor Lord Brahma, nor anyone else can comprehend *Nārāyana* fully. This inscrutable Supreme Lord occupies my heart. Therefore all that is said in the scriptures are understood by me. *Even for you, my preceptor, there can be nothing better than the grace of this Supreme Lord'.*

"The preceptor did not say anything. He felt there was no salvation for him and was afraid that his end was near. As though he had just then seen a disastrous dream, losing heart, he ran to Hiranyan and said, 'O lord, please listen. Your son is uttering words which are not good for this world or the next. They are unfit even to be conceived by the mind. He questions, 'By merely thinking of my father, what can I achieve?' and refuses to recite the Védas.' Hiranyan told him, 'Tell me exactly the new words spontaneously uttered by Prahlāda which are unacceptable to the brahmins and considered inappropriate by all.' The preceptor raising his hands over his head, replied that the words of Prahlāda were like a snake entering his ears. He would be dragged to hell and his tongue would be burnt, if he were to repeat them. The treacherous Hiranyan commanded his heartless attendants to bring his son forthwith. They rushed and conveyed Hiranyan's wish to Prahlāda. Soon Prahlāda who had Lord Tirumāl as his protector, appeared before Hiranyan and made obeisance to him. Hiranyan, gently and affectionately embraced his son. Seating him by his side, Hiranyan looked intently at Prahlāda and asked him to repeat the 'damaging' words which had annoyed his preceptor. *Prahlāda replied, 'The name I chanted was the*

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divine name of the Supreme Lord, who is the sole Lord for all. This name is part of Pranavam, the mystic OM. This is uttered first, while reciting the Védas. To cross the sea of obstacles in life, there is no greater name than this for all to feel, to consider, to listen to and preach!' When the divine Prahlāda spoke thus, the wicked Hiranyan felt that 'the blemishless teacher' would have taught only the 'right' word and if that was acceptable, there was no harm. If it was otherwise, Hiranyan wanted to know what it was. He said to Prahlāda, 'Tell me what you said.'

"Prahlāda replied, 'The name I uttered was the divine name of the God who gives what is sought, enables the attainment of a heavenly abode, and sends people to the celestial world as a reward for performing yāgas. *What I said was 'Namō Nārāyanāya' meaning salutations to the highest world of Lord Brahma.* All beings in these worlds, countless in number, whether static or moving, have in their minds only this name and nothing else. All including the three-eyed Lord Siva and the four-headed Lord Brahma will cease to exist if they are to forget the name of Nārāyana. It is not possible to adequately explain its greatness. Knowledgeable sages know the efficacy of this name, while others do not. *This name is a safe boat to carry all across the deep sea of births and rebirths.* This name will relieve them from the whirlpool of bad deeds committed in earlier births, and will take them to the shore of heavenly bliss. A rare jewel for anyone to wear, this name is the cream of philosophical doctrine within the boundaries of which is contained the true knowledge of the Upanishads. This divine name of Nārāyana will give lasting benefit and protection to me, to you, as well as to all others. Only after deep thought have I said this.'

"Hiranyan became furious. Holding a shining spear and emitting fire from his eyes, he looked at Prahlāda and said, 'From the time of my birth till now, my single command would scorch the mind which thought, or the tongue that uttered, this name you mentioned now. From whom did you learn it? Tell me at once! The Trinity of Gods, the Devas and others in all the three worlds pray sincerely at my feet. They are all afraid to utter the name you said. They think of only my name and chant it. My son! Who taught you this name? Tirumāl, who opposed me many a time in fierce battles, escaped from me, riding fast on Garuda and is hiding in the ocean of milk from where He has not come out. Who told you that the name of Tirumāl would offer protection? Many of our ancestors, who cannot even be counted, though the fine grains of sand in the sea can be counted, were killed by that Tirumāl. *If a rat were to recite the name of its enemy the snake, what benefit would the rat derive?* Tell me, you

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wicked fellow! My brother Hiranyākshan, capable of containing the fourteen worlds in his belly, was killed by Tirumāl in the form of a boar. Is it for the purpose of reciting this Tirumāl's name that I brought you forth? I, alone, can perform the three duties of creation, protection and destruction. Learn the truth from what you actually see. What else is said in the scriptures except that those who perform penance will attain greatness. The three Lords, *Hari, Brahma, and Siva* secured their coveted positions, because of their intense penance. *I have done greater penance and obtained true leadership, making them lose their prime position.* Realising this, they have abandoned their respective duties and have sought *my* protection! I have put a stop to the yāgas, penances, and literary exercises of my adversaries, because all of them have only growing hatred for me. How can the Trinity of Gods, who cannot protect themselves, protect others? You are an ignorant boy. I have excused your fault. Do not utter useless words. Believe that whatever is taught by your preceptor is good for you and recite the same. Go now!'

"Prahlāda said, 'O wearer of a fragrant garland! There is something which I have to tell you if you wish to know. It is the boundary of Védic knowledge and is like a drop of yoghurt which can convert milk (universal education) into curds (ultimate knowledge). O king, if you come out of your obstinacy, I will explain how you can attain true knowledge. You will then see it clearly, like a gooseberry fruit on the open palm of a hand. *The unique Supreme God creates all worlds from within and also resides in everything thus created like the oil inside the gingili seed. There is nothing before Him, nor is there anything after Him. He is constant. It is impossible for anyone to assess what exactly He is. If we sift and analyse all earthly things, we will find that there are two ways of knowing truth, namely 'Sānkhya' and 'Yōga'. Who else other than those who master these two, are capable of understanding the exalted position of the Supreme God. This God can be described as the form of knowledge shining like the pinnacle of the Védas. Only those sages who have realised themselves, will understand this unique form of God. There are quite a few ignorant ones who will not realise God. The stature of God cannot be measured by any scale. The Upanishads proclaim that He is beyond anyone's comprehension. He cannot also be adequately described. No one can see His true form. The three worlds, the three Gunas and all things in the universe are nothing but His manifestations! He appears in countless different forms, filling every part of the universe endlessly. He is the solitary and unique God, beyond the comprehension of the Devas and sages. Those who can really understand the greatness*

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of this Supreme God will be able to cross the sea of births, and reach the shores of heavenly bliss.

"This God shines as the indestructible Lord who is extolled by mystic verses and penances that yield great good. He takes the form of offerings made through great yāgas performed in accordance with the four Védas. This God stands first and foremost in granting enjoyable benefits to all. He will then make them enjoy or suffer from the effects of their fate. It is all His will. *Those who do not come under His grace will not know this because of His divine deception!* The good or bad experienced by all beings, depend upon the *punyam* or *pāpam* done by them. But, if they have the grace of this God, they can obtain anything they aspire for. Do you need any further evidence of His greatness? Those who perform yāgas according to the scriptures, finally give their offerings only to Lord Tirumāl. Remember that not only these offerings, but also the benefits accruing from the yāgas, will reach everywhere. The prime origin of the universe is a part of this true God! Can those who lack knowledge of the true God ever understand the beginning or the end of the universe? All, including Lord Brahma, flow from Lord Tirumāl who is beyond the comprehension of His devotees and is incomparable. He is immeasurable and transcends the vision of the viewers. He is the embodiment of spiritual knowledge, residing in the hearts of great seers who not only perceive Him, but can make Him perceptible to others.

'This God pervades the thoughts, actions, and words of all. He is in all their five sense organs. He is the very essence and form of the Pranavam combining the three sounds 'A', 'U' and 'M', producing the sound 'ŌM'. Those who surrender before this divine God, are relieved of lust, anger and other bad qualities. The efficacy of His divine name and the protection He affords to His devotees, are beyond description. Like the seed of the banyan tree which compresses within itself the whole tree, this God contains within Himself, the whole world. He is the essence and embodiment of time, instrument and place, indispensable for any act. He is the achiever of the results of such an act and also the enjoyer of the resultant benefits. He is the cleanser of lives, the creator of virtues and all the attendant wealth. *He is like the clear and melodious musical notes drawn from a veena. Though He is inside and outside all objects, He is dissociated from any blemish that may be associated with such objects.* He eludes realisation even through the scriptures! Among the syllables of the one-worded incantation 'ŌM', He shines as their very substance. He is the knowledge that leads to the understanding of the inner meaning of life. He pervades the three worlds,

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resembling smoke and fire in their capacity to spread everywhere at the same time. *Just as different kinds of flowers that bloom during different seasons are linked in a garland, the Supreme God, though described differently by different religious teachers, is one and the same like the waves and the sea.* I was only afraid that you, my father, would lose your great wealth and long life by deriding this God. That is why, I recited the divine name of Nārāyana and extolled Him'.

"Hiranyan became furious. The sun and the celestial region became unsteady. The big world trembled. Emitting blood and fire from his eyes, Hiranyan said, 'I do not need a worse enemy than the one born to me. I have all along been nurturing this enemy within me. There is no further need for me to know the mind of this worthless fellow. He says he is loyal to my sworn enemy. Slay him!' Instantly, Asuras who were expert killers, more cruel and mightier than Yama, with their eyes emitting fire, surrounded Prahlāda like a pride of ferocious lions encircling a baby elephant. They took him outside the tall mountainous palace gates. With a roar, they announced that they would eat him alive. *The next moment they hurled innumerable axes and sharp swords at Prahlāda who loved all beings in the world more than a mother. As he was protected by the sacred Lord Tirumāl, these weapons were like the ineffective words of abuse coming from the lips of worthless persons.* They were reduced to powder the moment they touched him. They did not leave even a scratch on the body of that pure and bold Prahlāda, who neither forgot the red feet of his Lord nor stopped chanting His name. The Asuras came back to the mighty Hiranyan and told him that the deadly weapons had no effect on his son and sought further directions. Hiranyan observed that perhaps his son was a conjurer and was able to control the weapons by māya. He directed them to kindle a fire and push Prahlāda into it. The Asuras filled a pit with logs of firewood to the height of a mountain and set fire to them. Into that fire they poured pots and pots of oil, butter and ghee. The flames from the fire touched the sky. The Devas shed tears and took pity on Prahlāda while the Asuras pushed him into the fire. Reciting the name of 'Hari', Prahlāda paid homage to the sacred feet of Lord Tirumāl. *The hot fire became cool.*"

Vibheeshana, continuing his narration to Rāvana, said, *"Remember, how the cruel Rākshasās, as deadly as poison, had covered Hanuman's tail with cloth (at your instance), poured ghee over it, and set fire to it. But the soothing words of chaste Seeta produced coolness and the tail of Hanuman did not suffer from the effects of fire. Similarly, the chanting of the divine name of the Lord by Prahlāda, produced coolness*

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to the depth of his very bones. These cruel Asuras went back to Hiranyan and told him that the furious fire into which his son was pushed, did not harm him. Hiranyan grew wild. With an angry look, he directed that Agni be tied and imprisoned for ignoring his commands, and that the eight big serpents be released to bite and eat that 'deceitful' Prahlāda. These serpents including Anantan arrived the moment Hiranyan thought of them. They furiously bit the beautiful body of Prahlāda with their sharp sword-like poisonous teeth. No harm came to Prahlāda who never gave up remembering the divine name of Lord Tirumāl. Fearing what would happen to them for their inability to obey Hiranyan, the serpents opened their mouths bringing out black poison, and bit Prahlāda with a wrath that would frighten even Garuda the enemy of serpents. Nothing happened to Prahlāda. The teeth of the serpents fell off looking like the small crescent moons falling out of red clouds. Through the holes created in the body of Prahlāda by the serpents' bites, drops of nectar flowed. The Asuras rushed to Hiranyan and reported to him that the eight serpents encircling Prahlāda could not even create scars with their poisonous teeth.

"Hiranyan then directed his Asuras to get Irāvatam, the mightiest among the regional rutted elephants, to trample Prahlāda. These merciless Asuras went and conveyed to Devendra, the commands of Hiranyan. Afraid of his anger, Devendra quickly sent his mighty and ferocious four-tusked elephant Irāvatam. The Asuras bound the hands, legs, chest and neck of Prahlāda, and pushed him in front of Irāvatam. *The truthful Prahlāda looked at the elephant and said, 'Gajendra, an ancestor of yours, when caught by a crocodile, prayed to Lord Tirumāl extolling Him as the foremost, and sought His protection. Immediately, Tirumāl arrived and saved Gajendra by killing the crocodile. This Lord Tirumāl is always in my mind!'* After listening to Prahlāda, Irāvatam bowed and bent down with its golden face-plate touching the ground, paid obeisance to Prahlāda, and left the place. When this was conveyed by the Asuras to Hiranyan, he became furious. He told them that by respecting Tirumāl, the elephant had belittled him and commanded them to kill the mighty elephant. The helpless elephant came back to the golden-complexioned Prahlāda and tried to kill him with its lustrous tusks. Pressing his chest with its white tusks, the elephant attacked the heroic and mighty Prahlāda. Instantly, all the tusks of Irāvatam broke and fell like the sheaths around the trunk of a plantain tree. On seeing this, the Asuras reached Hiranyan with the speed of sparks of fire and told him of their inability to take the life of his son as desired by him. Hiranyan became furious, and his eyes resembled the scorching summer sun.

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"Hiranyan then told his servants, 'This deceptive Prahlāda defies all our efforts to kill him. Bind him tightly to an unshakeable mountain and put him to shame by throwing him into a deep shoreless sea'. Realising that Hiranyan was bent upon killing his steadfast son, the Asuras tied Prahlāda to a big mountain, and moving like wind, threw him into the middle of the sea. Prahlāda was chanting the divine name of the great Lord Tirumāl the embodiment of dharma. The deep sea became like a puddle for Prahlāda, and the mountain was like a small container. *Just as Tirumāl, at the end of the world, taking the guise of a child, would sleep on the leaf of the banyan tree, Prahlāda Praying to God with his hands raised over his head, was seen shining without any hardship on that mountain to which he was tied.* Prahlāda who realised God, the end of all scriptures, was not drowned in the tidal sea! Lying on it, chanting the thousand names of Lord Tirumāl, and addressing Him, Prahlāda said, 'You are the harsh God who punishes the wicked! O virtuous Lord beyond the comprehension of anyone! I am the humblest of your devotees. Do I possess the strength to bear the troubles inflicted on me by my tormentors? Will you not extend your grace and appear before me in my present predicament? You are like the nectar churned from the ocean of milk. Is it your habit to test our vacillating senses? Even the celestials including Brahma, fail in their search to find you out. How can I, an innocent boy, worship and please you, just in a day? Probably there is no sin I have not committed, and those sins are tormenting me now. Perhaps their effects take away the lives of your devotees? How can one forget the mode of expiation afforded by your divine grace to your devotees? There are countless people who feel that their own minds are better equipped to reach you. However, as you are beyond even their comprehension, they are unable to realise you. They are caught by the illusion created by you.

'Can the Devas who had declared that they were the supreme gods capable of performing any exceptional feat, achieve their avowed aspirations without your grace? *If there is a book which asserts that a particular God is the ultimate one, there will be many others that contradict such an assertion. But as God, you never change, because you are the sum and substance of all scriptures to all those who realise you.* Are you playing now? Even Lord Brahma and Lord Siva have not understood you. How can I know you? *When different parts like the leaves, flowers and fruits (ripe and unripe) are seen, is it hard to identify them collectively as a tree?* Though the worlds created by you, have transformed themselves into different ones, can they be different from you? *Golden ornaments may vary. But still they are all made only of gold!* With the love of a mother and a father, you created me. You are in my heart. It was you who

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gave me the ailment of birth, and you are yourself its remedy'. With these words, Prahlāda worshipped the Lord.

"Learning that Prahlāda had once again survived, Hiranyan told the Asuras, 'Bring Prahlāda before me.' Accordingly he was brought. Deciding to relieve Prahlāda of his 'madness', Hiranyan ordered that Prahlāda be given a deadly poison. Prahlāda consumed the poison fed by the Asuras, always thinking of Tirumāl, and remained without fainting. With cruel eyes, Hiranyan immediately ordered that Prahlāda be killed by the lashes of sturdy whips. Countless cruel Asuras simultaneously lashed him with whips. Those who saw this, felt he would not survive. But throughout Prahlāda was found repeating, 'The hands of Lord Tirumāl are countless and not just a thousand'. Disgusted that the Asuras could not kill Prahlāda, Hiranyan felt that he himself should kill his son and went up to him with a fierce look which frightened the seven skies. *Making obeisance to Hiranyan, Prahlāda said, 'O my father, if you think of taking away my life, remember that my life is not what you think it is. This life is dedicated to Lord Tirumāl who has created all the worlds'.* Hiranyan asked his son, 'Who created all these worlds? Was it Brahma, Vishnu and Siva who live only by reciting my name, or the sages? Or, was it the Devas who lost everything to me, or anyone else? Tell me!' Despite his anger, Hiranyan did not try to kill Prahlāda, hoping that his son would show such a person. *Prahlāda replied, 'The Supreme God who created the world and the different lives therein, is none other than Lord Tirumāl. This God who pervades all is the very fragrance of flowers and the oil in gingili seeds. This God who is my Supreme Lord is visible in all places where I am. He is visible to my eyes because I am His ardent devotee. When I conveyed this truth to you with love, you did not take it seriously. This God, Lord Tirumāl with lotus eyes, slew your brother Hiranyākshan. Do you think this God is so ordinary as to be visible to your eyes? This God possesses the three qualities of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. His tasks are three; to create, protect and destroy. His forms are three; Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. His eyes are three; the sun, the moon and fire. His worlds are three; the one above, the one below and this world. These have been created by Him and are functioning under His divine direction. He is the standing proof of all objects having the characteristics of creation, preservation and destruction. This is the finality of the Védas. This is also true'.*

"Hiranyan laughed sarcastically, showing his teeth. He told Prahlāda, 'You say that the one you are referring to, is present everywhere. Let me see the truth of what you have said. Is this thief hiding in this pillar? If so, show him to me!' Prahlāda replied,

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'My God is contained even in an object as small as a foot. If an atom is divided into one hundred parts, in every part thereof His existence is ensured. He pervades even the big Meru mountain. He is in this pillar, and in the very words you have uttered. You will soon see the nature of this Almighty'. Hiranyan said, 'Show me in this pillar the God whom you claim as omnipresent and a benefactor to you and the Devas, so that I can see him. Should you fail, I will kill you, like a lion killing an elephant, suck your red blood and eat your body'. *The wise Prahlāda looked at his father and said, 'My life is not so simple as to be taken away by you. Should my Lord fail to appear in all the places mentioned now, I will myself put an end to my life. If I do not do this and continue to live in this world, I will not be a devotee of that Lord of mine'.* On hearing this, Hiranyan repeatedly said, 'All right' and laughed. He rushed towards the pillar in front of him and struck it like thunder with his mighty hand. *Instantly, Lord Tirumāl in the guise of a ferocious lion with red eyes, laughed from inside the pillar with great fury, as if the eight directions had opened up and the whole world had split.*

"The good-natured Prahlāda had assured Hiranyan that he would seek and show him the divine Lord whom even Brahma could not see after searching for Him daily. When Lord Tirumāl appeared in that pillar in the guise of a lion and laughed, Prahlāda danced for joy and shed tears of happiness. He sang aloud worshipping and extolling the almighty God. Hiranyan who heard the roar of the lion from the pillar, shouted, 'I say! Who are you that laughed now? Are you Hari who ran away from me and hid in the sea? Have you now taken refuge in this tall pillar, finding the sea water inadequate? If you are fit to fight with me, come out. Start the fight right now'. Hiranyan made this challenge and advanced with his famous steps making the whole world tremble. *The pillar broke and the Man-Lion Lord came out, growing in size in all the eight directions and also in height as if to measure the heaven and other regions beyond the world! Who could conceive and describe this awesome sight that split the world and rent the sky? We do not know the boundaries of the sky through which this Lord Narasimhamurti (wearing a fragrant tulasi garland) penetrated. When He stood on the ground with His divine crimson feet touching the earth, even Lord Brahma of the celestial world looked as if He had just emerged from the navel of that Lord.* None in the world could count the number of hands that the Man-Lion Lord had. These hands caught hold of the sea-like army of billions of Asuras. Against each of these

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sharp-toothed Asuras, appeared a divine face with two hands. On each of the divine faces, three red fire-like eyes were seen.

"The mouth of the divine Lord was so big that it contained the seven seas, mountains and everything else. All the lives retained in the belly of Lord Tirumāl at the time of pralaya, were now seen in the mouth of the sharp-toothed Lord Narasimhamurti! He gave protection to all who followed dharma, and annihilated the cruel Asuras along with their kith and kin, who departed from dharma. He held many cruel Asuras firmly in His sharp teeth, crushed many of them on the ground with His legs, threw many of them beyond the universe, knocked some of them on the Meru, squeezed some of them to death, sunk many of them into the deep sea allowing bubbles to rise, and roasted several others in fire. That Narasimhamurti severed some Asuras into two, tore their mouths, peeled their skins as if tearing pieces of cloth, dug out their eyes, took their lives with His hands cutting them into pieces, and kneaded them many times. He pinched and crushed all those Asuras who tried to hide between His fingers, ate away the elephants, horses, and chariots of the Asuras, drank the water in the seven seas together with the varieties of fish therein, and swallowed the thundering clouds floating in the sky. Even the goddess of dharma was afraid, and wondered whether the wrath of the Man-Lion Lord would subside at all when He dashed some of the Asuras against mountains, rubbed some of them against the outer wall surrounding the sky, pushed some against the impregnable seven hills, attacked some with His hands, rubbed a few against the darkness that filled the eight directions, pinched with His nails the heads of some of the Asuras making their bodies roll down like mountains, kneaded them in such a way as to produce fire, and killed them by various methods according to the degree of their cruel crimes!

"Killing all the Asuras in the upper, middle, and lower worlds, Lord Narasimhamurti destroyed even those who were in the wombs of Asura women. Some of the hands of that Narasimhamurti searched the very heavens and other worlds to ensure that no Asura was spared. In a split second, the big-eyed Narasimhamurti killed all the Asuras except Hiranyan and his noble son Prahlāda, and stood nonchalantly. The heroic Hiranyan unsheathed his sword which appeared like a thunderbolt, and held it in his right hand. In the left, he held his impeccable circular shield that could cover the whole sky. Frightening the Devas, the seven seas and the mighty mountains, and biting his lips with great rage, Hiranyan stood fearlessly like the living Meru before that Man-Lion. *The universally-extolled Prahlāda, looking at Hiranyan standing ready for the fight, said, 'Even after seeing this awesome*

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form of the Lord, your cruel mind does not appear to have acquired sense. Please worship my Lord who has with Him, the Disc that can destroy His enemies. He will then forgive you your sinful deeds'. Hiranyan laughed aloud terrifying the very skies and said, 'Listen! I will sever the mighty shoulders and legs of this Lion in your very presence and then slice you. Except worshipping my sword, I have never bowed before anyone not even when I used to indulge in love-play with womenfolk'.Uttering these words, Hiranyan roared with laughter. With fire emanating from his mouth, hands, sword and legs, he moved with great rage to oppose Narasimhamurti. *The Man-Lion Lord (who knew how to excel the illusions of all the Asuras), with His mighty hands and legs caught Hiranyan from all sides, with a prowess surpassing the reckoning of even the most knowledgeable. The two of them clasped each other tightly and rose high over all the worlds and beyond the visibility of anyone. Fearless and ghastly Hiranyan looked like the Meru, while Lord Narasimhamurti looked like everything else!*

"After encircling and holding Hiranyan tightly, Narasimhamurti roared and appeared like the ocean of milk with splashing waves. Hiranyan who was caught in His grip, looked like the Meru caught in the middle of the ocean of milk. Rubbing Hiranyan's sword, shoulders, and tuft of hair against the wall of the vast sky created by Lord Brahma, Narasimhamurti with one of His huge hands, caught hold of Hiranyan's legs and swung him round, making the gem-set ornaments worn by him shed lustre all around. Hiranyan's two ear-rings fell over the eastern and western regions making the sky appear red as at sunrise and sunset. *The unique Narasimhamurti, the bountiful Lord who grants a place in heaven to His devotees, pierced Hiranyan's chest which was as hard as a diamond, with His sharp white nails resembling the thunderbolt. Blood flowed from Hiranyan's body and spread all over the world. It was the hour between sunset and nightfall. At the threshold of the exquisite palace, the magnificently deceptive Lord placed Hiranyan's chest on His beautiful thighs. Blood spurted upwards with sparks of fire, killing Hiranyan and relieving the Devas of their agony.* Soon after Hiranyan was slain, Lord Siva with three eyes, Lord Brahma with eight eyes, Devendra with a thousand eyes, and all those including the Devas, sages and others, who, afraid of Hiranyan, had gone into hiding, came down wondering with what eyes they could see this awesome sight. They were frightened at the omnipresence and appearance of Narasimhamurti with His many faces, hands, bodies and legs which were beyond description. The Lord was so gigantic and

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boundless in size, that the distance between one tooth and the other in His mouth, was over several thousand miles and the number of faces was over several millions.

"Lord Brahma appeared before Lord Narasimhamurti and said, 'The scriptures declare that God created Himself as the Supreme Lord. This has been proved by your creating yourself as the handsome Narasimhamurti inside this pillar. While you have the distinction of creating yourself, how strange it is that you have created me to create all lives? Billions of heavens have sprung from you, just like bubbles appearing from the cool sea, and bursting thereafter. You are the very embodiment of all beings. To destroy them, you have created yourself as Lord Narasimhamurti. *Will you not be blamed for manifesting unlimited prowess?* You are the God, who gives different names to one and the same object depending upon its different qualities. You are supreme and omnipresent. There is no one without you. When this is so, whom are you creating, whom are you protecting and whom are you slaying? We do not know. *You created me in you. Due to your grace I brought forth everyone. O my father and Lord, except you, there is no beginning or end for me. I am like the jewel created out of gold which still remains gold! I do not stand separated from you'*. Thereafter, the unblinking eight-eyed Lord Brahma, Lord Siva, the Devas, sages and others, standing on either side of, Lord Narasimhamurti worshipped Him. He controlled His anger and offered protection to them through His hands which excelled the red lotus. He gracefully told them not to be afraid. Goddess Lakshmi who was an ornament of beauty, wealth for all, the embodiment of heavenly bliss, born along with the nectar of immortality from the ocean of milk, a companion to all and a mother for all the Devas, hailing from the lotus was sent to appease the Man-Lion Lord, by Lord Brahma and others. *Like a perennial lamp, Goddess Lakshmi who brought forth all beings from the beginning, was seated with ecstasy in the middle of the red lotus.* With love, Narasimhamurti looked at Goddess Lakshmi who had helped to create a harmless world. The sages who watched this, seized the occasion to eulogise Him and prayed.

"Lord Narasimhamurti (Tirumāl) looked at Prahlāda, His devotee who had lost his father, and said, 'Even when I killed your father in your very presence, you displayed boundless love for me. You never gave up dharma. You deserve my grace. What is the reward you seek from me? Within a thousandth part of a second, I sought with fury your father's life and extinguished it with my finger-nails, as a punishment for all his sins. Yet you were steady, without exhibiting grief. What should I do for you? I assure you that hereafter, I will not kill the Asuras belonging to your race. In

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all your future births, I will be benevolent towards you. If there is anything to be done by me, do tell me at once without feeling shy'. *Prahlāda replied, 'There is no end to the favours I have received from you so far. Is there anything more that awaits me? If so, all that I seek from you is that even if I attain a boneless and despicable worm-like body, please bless me to continue to receive your love'.*

"The graceful Lord was happy that His devotee was indeed great. He blessed Prahlāda with a boon that even if the five age-old elements were to perish, he would be eternal like Himself. The Lord then said, 'O son with a glittering body excelling lightning! By offering prayers to you, all beings of the three worlds will derive the same benefits that they get by worshipping me. O scholar in ancient scriptures! All my devotees shall also be your devotees. You shall become the king not only of the Asuras but also of the Devas. This unique greatness is for none else! *O expert in the ancient Védas! Dharma, truth, the four scriptures, outstanding grace, endless philosophical knowledge and the eight great ancient qualities, namely, the creation of self, immaculateness, intuitive wisdom, omniscience, freedom from illusions, boundless compassion, omnipotence, and infinite happiness will all be yours. May you live with growing prosperity!'* After granting these boons to Prahlāda, Lord Narasimhamurti called upon the Devas to honour him and announce his coronation with the beating of drums enabling all the worlds to worship him with folded hands. In accordance with the directions of the Lord, a sacrificial fire was lit by Brahma and the rest of the rituals were performed by others. *The crowning was done by Lord Narasimhamurti! Thus Prahlāda who had mastered all the great scriptures without the help of preceptors, became the ruler of the three worlds."* Vibheeshana the wisest concluded, "My lord Rāvana! This is what happened in the past. If you ignore my words, I warn you that evil alone will overtake you."

4. VIBHEESHANA TAKES REFUGE

Rāvana did not realise that Vibheeshana's words of advice would do him good. With an unsteady mind, with red eyes, and with the fury of fire, he told him, "O conqueror of death through penance! You seem to have developed love for that Tirumāl, because He protected all those who surrendered to Him and killed Hiranyan who was stronger than all of us. *Prahlāda, who had been brought up by his father Hiranyan, became happy when his father was killed by that deceitful Tirumāl. Intimate as you are with our enemies, can anyone else except that Prahlāda be compared to you?* Like the fond hope of

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Prahlāda the son of mighty Hiranyan, if your wish comes true and I am defeated by Rāma and Lakshmana, do you, poor fellow, hope to amass my wealth and live happily? Can you succeed? More than even our enemies, you seem to hate our Rākshasās. You already possess love and intense attachment, capable of melting even one's bones, for Rāma and Lakshmana! Shedding tears of joy, you praise them lavishly. Is there anything more to be said about you? Establishing friendship with my enemies, you have already planned everything. You have schemed to defeat me. With mighty plans, you are after my kingdom. Do I need another foe? Being afraid of our enemies, you are unfit to offer battle. You want to surrender to these men because of your love for them. With a deceitful mind, you have decried your ancestors. Is it good to live keeping poison with us? I am not killing you, because of the blame that would fall on me. It is better that you leave me at once. If you continue to stand before me, you will be slain by my hands." Rāvana had lost his senses only to attain his destruction. Vibheeshana, along with his associates stood up in the sky and said, "Rāvana, you deserve to live; therefore, listen to me. You have not thought of protecting your life which can last until the end of the universe with all prosperity. Have you decided to perish, listening to the words of advice of ignoble persons? Can those who give up dharma live happily? Will you die only after witnessing the torture (by Rāma's fierce arrows) of your sons, elders, kith and kin and all those weak and mighty who have sought protection from you? *I have told you all that is just which can give you eternal bliss; but you have not understood me. O lord, forgive me for my faults." With these words, the noble Vibheeshana left Lanka.* Analan, Anilan, Aran and Sampāti, wearers of heroes' anklets and expert strategists, joined him.

Learning that Rāma and Lakshmana along with Sugreeva, the leader of the army of monkeys, had already arrived on the shore of the vast sea, Vibheeshana and the four ministers crossed the sea and reached the opposite shore. Vibheeshana saw the big vānara army resembling an ocean of milk replete with lotus flowers. "If all living creatures are placed on one side and the monkeys on the other side, the monkeys will outnumber the former," said the faultless Vibheeshana, to his ministers who had lustrous weapons stuck to their bodies. Vibheeshana continued, "I love Rāma who respects virtue most. Even inadvertently, I do not want to lead a life that would bring anything but fame. I told my brother, Rāvana, to bear in mind my firm conviction. Not liking my advice, he has cast me away. What else can I do now?" The wise ministers boldly asserted that their duty was to go and see Rāma, the very embodiment of dharma. *Vibheeshana agreed with his ministers and said, "If we had done anything else, we would be guilty of the same crimes that the other Rākshasās are guilty of. Let*

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us therefore reach the divine feet of Rāma, the possessor of boundless virtue and get rid of this birth. I have never seen him before, nor do I know him. Still, I do not know why, I love him. When I think of him, even the bones in my body become cool and my heart melts. But for these spontaneous feelings, Rāma would have appeared an enemy to this worthless mortal. Thanks to my penance, I obtained from Lord Brahma whatever I wanted, namely, everlasting love for the Supreme Lord, adherence to dharma, affection for all beings and the grace of saints and sages. The boons granted by Lord Brahma long ago are bearing fruit now. As my ministers, what you have said after deep thought is faultless. Let us fulfil our avowed object by falling at the divine lotus feet of our eternal Lord Tirumāl." Vibheeshana felt relaxed and free from agony. He and his four ministers decided it would not be proper to go to Rāma during the dark night. They stayed in a grove unseen by anyone. The night disappeared with the arrival of the sun in his rolling chariot.

In the mean time, constantly thinking of Seeta, Rāma reached the sea-shore, planning to cross the tidal sea with his army. There, he happily looked at the groves, the twigs, the sandy surface, the thorny shrubs, the flowers in bloom, and the black lilies resembling Seeta's eyes. Male and female swans sitting on punnai trees attracted his attention. He looked attentively at the pearls, corals, heaps of gems (gathered and stored by the waves), golden shores, bewildering gardens, sandy hills and the huge rolling waves of the sea. He saw fisher-women (separated from their husbands) shedding tears and disturbing the whirlpools of water. White waves dashed against fragrant leafy flowers protected by throny shrubs, splashing cool drops of dew all over. Male swans embraced their mates and slept on these plants. Looking at this, he heaved a sigh. A white female stork with a melodious voice was awaiting the return of her male partner who had gone to fetch a fish for her. He felt sorry for this female stork. In another place, two furious male swans were fighting fiercely over a lonely female swan. On seeing this, Rāma arched his eyebrows in anger and pressed his pearly teeth over his coral lip. Sugreeva, Hanuman, Angada, Jāmbavan and the others arrived there and consoled Rāma who was in distress. Partially relieved of his agony, he left the place like one who had regained his senses.

After Rāma settled down, he was closeted with his learned friends. While the vānaras had taken positions around him according to their ranks, Vibheeshana, the possessor of a hero's anklets, arrived there with a fearless mind. Instantly all the vānaras collectively shouted, "Rākshasās are seen in the midst of our glorious army.

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Beat them up! Hurl weapons at them." Surrounding Vibheeshana, they said, "As a reward for our sacrifice, Rāvana has been made to come here. This sinner is none other than the king of Lanka who has come to commit more sins. Our anxieties have come to an end." Some monkeys looked at Vibheeshana and wondered whether the twenty hands and ten heads of Rāvana had already been destroyed. A few others challenged him to a fight. Speaking in different voices, the enraged monkeys competed with each other in obstructing him, mistaking him for Rāvana. Some suggested, "Let us put him into prison at once and inform Lord Rāma." Some others observed that instead of wasting their time just looking at him, they should attack him at once. Accordingly, they advanced towards him. Yet others observed that they could do nothing, if, being a Rākshasa, he quickly flew into the sky. Therefore, they said that killing him at once would be the best thing to do.

Two vānaras, Mayindan and Tumindan, experts in the Védic art of studying the character and behaviour of persons, arrived at Hanuman's behest and asked the other vānaras to go away. Looking at Vibheeshana and the others who appeared to be virtuous, and deciding that they were not deceitful Rākshasās, Mayindan asked them, "Who are you? What is the purpose of your visit? Have you come here because you are afraid to fight? Why have you sneaked into our midst? Tell us the truth without hiding anything." *Analan, one of Vibheeshana's ministers, replied, "The noble-minded and disciplined follower of dharma, Vibheeshana, the great-grandson of Lord Brahma, has come here to surrender himself at the divine feet of Lord Rāma the leader of the Solar dynasty. This Vibheeshana by his severe penance has secured boons from Lord Brahma, namely, 'Never to deviate from the path of dharma', 'Great devotion to the Supreme Lord Tirumāl', 'Never to depart from truth' and 'Compassion for the sages'. This Vibheeshana told Rāvana, 'You have foolishly tried to hide scorching fire in a piece of cloth. You have imprisoned the wife of Rāma, the universal Lord. If you release her, you will live; otherwise you will perish.' But Rāvana, an embodiment of vices, who has lost his senses, told him that he was sparing him only because he was his brother and also threatened to kill him if he continued to stand before him. Discarding Rāvana, Vibheeshana has arrived here to surrender himself to Lord Rāma."*

Bearing in mind Analan's words, Mayindan asked his brother, Tumindan, and his fearless army to keep vigil and instructed the vānaras to be seated. After assuring Analan that his words would be conveyed to their leader, Mayindan went to Rāma who was seated inside a temple of compassion, protected by the fence of dharma,

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knowledge, and penance, with greatness and patience for an entrance! Prostrating himself at his divine feet, Mayindan sought the permission of Rāma the eternal Lord, to speak. Rāma, with a divine body resembling a lotus pond, nodded his head and asked Mayindan to speak freely of what he had heard and seen. Mayindan replied, "There is one Vibheeshana (possessing cool flowery hands) here, who is the younger brother of the deceitful king of Lanka. Accompanied by his four ministers, Vibheeshana has come into our midst. Our mighty army began to attack them; but I asked them to disperse. When I wanted to know who these Rākshasās were, one of Vibhishana's associates, Analan, told me that their leader Vibheeshana, unable to tolerate the sinful acts of Rāvana, has decided to surrender himself at your divine feet and wants to appear before you. This Vibheeshana who follows dharma and truth, has received boons from Lord Brahma. He has warned Rāvana, 'If you continue to imprison Seeta, without sending her back to Rāma, Lanka will be converted into a mountain of Rākshasa bones and your heads will roll on the ground. Unable to tolerate the advice of Vibheeshana, Rāvana threatened to kill him if he stood in his presence any longer." Rāma addressed his friends seated nearby, "You have heard Mayindan. Please tell me sincerely after thinking deeply, whether this Vibheeshana is fit to be kept with us or not."

Sugreeva, wearing a lustrous gem-set crown, and ever conscious of his duties, lifted his flowery hands and made obeisance to the lotus-eyed Rāma. Deciding that this was the right place and time to speak out, Sugreeva said, "O Rāma, you are beyond even destiny! You have already mastered the four Védas and all that is said from Manu downwards. Have you questioned the like of us to really know something? Yet, in deference to your wish, I give my views. Whether you feel they are worthy or unworthy, kindly examine them after listening to me. Vibheeshana has left his brother, Rāvana, not because of any fight between them, nor because of any weapon thrown at him by Rāvana to take away his life. Vibheeshana's action is neither righteous nor just. After all who is a good one among Rākshasās? To desert a proud brother, parents, exalted preceptor, and a king, when facing attack from enemies, is improper and deserves to be ridiculed. *Talking sweetly to his brother when something has to be achieved, and coming to us out of fear instead of giving up his life when confronted by war, is not the role of a great person in this manly world!* If one seeks dharma, and if there are impediments, the best way is to take to an ascetic way of life and not to surrender to the enemies and be laughed at. When Rāvana lived in fame, Vibheeshana was friendly with him and enjoyed his wealth. Now, when Rāvana is in distress facing war, Vibheeshana forsakes him and surrenders to

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the enemy. To whom can he be a genuine relation? We see that Vibheeshana had given up his penance and wisdom when Mārica, commanded by his nephew, Rāvana, took the guise of a golden deer and indulged in vices. Why should we not repudiate such a Vibheeshana? We are ready to conquer even Yama and the whole world if they come and confront us. *Does our enemy's brother deserve to make his appearance by our side? Can he be of help to us? Is the brother of our enemy fit to help us?* We have taken a pledge to annihilate the Rākshasās and protect dharma. If we accept the assistance of the very same merciless Rākshasās to fight the war, it will make others feel that there is a deficiency in our strength. Real relatives should be steadfast during separation, as well as when they are together; when they lose their belongings, as well as when they share food. Vibheeshana has come here only to deceive us and not to surrender. *O collyrium-complexioned Lord, are you going to accept Vibheeshana who is more venomous than poison?"*

Rāma next turned to Jāmbavan who was incomparable in knowledge, and sought his views. Aware of the ancient path of dharma, Jāmbavan said, "However learned one may be, one who associates with the enemy will perish. Even though we may observe that these Rākshasās who have come here appear to follow dharma, they are deceptive by nature. Will the world approve if we accept them? Powerful enemies prefer deceptive tactics! To cheat us, they will secure us victories initially, and remove our difficulties. At the opportune moment, they will surround us and inflict harm. Is it proper for us to associate ourselves with these lowly ones? It is in the nature of Rākshasās to obstruct the Védas and yāgas, harm the sages and cause agony to the Devas. When such evil ones join us, will they shower love without harming us? *If we give them protection for surrendering to us and later cast them away for cheating us, great blame will fall on us for giving refuge to them in the beginning and deserting them later.* Even dharma will frown on us. Have we not seen that the Rākshasās appear to do us good in the beginning and harm us later? *The arrival of Mārica in the form of a deer when you were living in the forest along with Seeta, can be compared to the arrival of this outsider now."*

Rāma then asked Neelan (the leader who had delved deep into several books on morals) to express his views. Neelan said, "O Lord with limitless literary knowledge! There are ways of taking the help of enemies. *I will sum them up and explain them to you provided you listen to my words intently and do not laugh at me because they come from a monkey.* Those who retreat in fear from their relatives afraid of the

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enemies, those who have developed animosity on account of a woman, those who have lost boundless wealth because of the wrath of others, those who are intensely fond of themselves, those who have arrived after showing their backs to their enemies in a fight, those who have become poor because of the misdeeds of their kin, those who seek our friendship after tormented by the ruler of an adjoining country, and those who are in love with a creeper-like woman in the custody of enemies, are the only ones who may be given refuge if they come for protection. As against this category of humble persons, if mighty and dreadful ones are to seek refuge and we accept them, they will destroy us and go back. Before taking a decision, we have to find out to which of the above categories Vibheeshana belongs. *Looking at the time of his arrival, looking at the books we have studied, and looking at Vibheeshana who has come away from his brother in anger, I doubt whether we can believe him."*

All who loved Rāma and all the experienced ministers present, agreed that it was wrong to give refuge to Vibheeshana. The inscrutable Rāma looked at Māruti (who knew the right path) and asked him, "O wise Hanuman! All have spoken unanimously. What are your views?" *Hanuman commenced with the preamble that it was the duty of great ones like Rāma to encourage and elevate beings like him though they were not knowledgeable.* Bowing his head in reverence and covering his mouth, scholarly Hanuman said, "All those here, capable of analysing everything, have said that acceptance of Vibheeshana is not desirable. O learned one, is it then necessary that I should also say something? What the noble ministers dared to tell you are no doubt pious thoughts. Still, I would say one thing. I do not consider Vibheeshana to be wicked. Deceit in a person will become apparent in a moment by looking at the face. *Can anyone succeed in hiding wickedness? Will enemies surrender before us? Deception is something which will remain inside one's mind. Even before words come out of deceitful persons, their faces will reveal their minds.* Knowing your virtue, and learning of the might of your sturdy and victorious bow which sent Vāli to heaven and installed Sugreeva as the king, Vibheeshana has voluntarily come here to seek your support for acquiring the kingdom of Lanka. The fact that the kingdom of the Rākshasās is never governed by the laws of virtuous ones, and your boundless grace in freely handing over the entire world to your younger brother, Bharata, and your adherence to truth, have all made Vibheeshana come to us. To say that the present time is not opportune for Vibheeshana to leave his brother and come here is incorrect, because he is strongly opposed to Rāvana. The cruel Rākshasās are experts in

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performing deceptive acts, but those who have voluntarily come here to us are capable of knowing the tricks of Rāvana and others. This will easily benefit us. Some of us here may feel, 'It is very difficult to find out the evil designs of these Rākshasās who will behave like good persons but will try to kill us.' This cannot be accepted by the wise. Is it fair to doubt the integrity of these humble ones who have come to us?"

Hanuman added, "When I had gone to Lanka to find Seeta, and reached Rāvana, he ordered that I should be put to death. It was Vibheeshana who intervened and told Rāvana that to kill women, cowards, and envoys who may even be harmful, were all not virtuous acts. As I went round Vibheeshana's golden palace in Lanka during the night, I noticed many good omens. I did not see either the cursed liquor or meat in his abode. It looked like the divine place of a charitable sage where good and elderly persons are worshipped! It was a place where respect for dharma and discipline were adhered to. *The unique daughter of Vibheeshana known as Tirisadai could be seen consoling my goddess, Seeta, with the words, 'O lady with exquisite forehead, Rāvana has earned a curse. As a result, if the evil-minded Rāvana were to touch you, he will die'.* Vibheeshana has come here with the belief that the arrows released by you will scorch and destroy Rāvana's congenital deceit as well as the boons he has acquired. If we examine the facts further, we will find that there is no one except Vibheeshana, who, though a Rākshasa, has secured great boons, philosophic knowledge and a merciful attitude through penance. O victorious king, you have taken up the unique task of destroying Rāvana, a task which even the three Supreme Lords would find difficult to accomplish! *When Vibheeshana has come at such a critical time seeking our protection, doubting him and not accepting him would be like a huge sea exhibiting fear that it may be swept away by the little water in a well!* To reject Vibheeshana on the plea that 'Those who belong to the enemies can never become our associates', will be a ridiculous decision which will be laughed at by learned persons. *Under the circumstances, I feel that Vibheeshana has come here with good intentions, though I am not aware of what is in your mind which can be considered as the very Védas."*

Listening to the nectarous words of Hanuman (who had learnt from Soorya, arts which even Brahma did not know), Rāma became happy and extolled him. Turning to the others, he said, "The words of Hanuman are very fine. I find that Vibheeshana has come here at the proper time. It may be true that he desires to possess the kingdom of Lanka. The very act of Vibheeshana (with boundless knowledge) coming to us shows that he is blemishless and has done great penance. *What Hanuman has said*

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after deep thought should be implemented. Even otherwise, is it fair for us to abandon Vibheeshana (whether we win or lose, or perish or prosper), after he has sought our refuge? We cannot discard him merely because he has come to us only today. Even if a person were to kill his parents or elders and seek our refuge, we cannot reject him. *He has to be treated like a long-standing friend. If such a person is to depart fom his duty and harm us despite receiving our protection, that will only bring glory to us and not any blame.* Can anyone forget the greatness of my ancestor Emperor Sibi who weighed himself on a scale for the sake of a pigeon which sought his refuge? Is it not therefore proper that I, a descendant of Sibi, should grant refuge to Vibheeshana who has surrendered to me? *Even if I die through Vibheeshana's deceit owing to my granting him refuge, that day (of my death) will give me everlasting fame unlike the day I refuse to give him refuge, fearing danger to my life from him!* Are you not aware of Lord Siva who consumed the deadly poison from the ocean of milk to protect the frightened Devas who approached Him? What is the use of one's dharma if one does not help the defeated, or does not display charity, or does not grant refuge to one who seeks it? *A senseless hunter once caught a female pigeon and went to catch its mate also. That male pigeon gathered sticks of wood, lit a fire, and burnt the sticks so that the hunter could warm himself from the chill and then fell into the fire giving up its body to relieve the hunter's hunger. Because of its noble act (greater than the contents of the Védas), that male pigeon attained heaven.*

"When Gajendra, an elephant overpowered by a crocodile, sought His protection, the Prime God transcending the Védas, appeared before the elephant and relieved its agony. Even though all the worlds belong to Him and the virtuous acts practised in all these worlds and the resultant rewards are all His own creations, yet He waits for those who seek refuge, to grant all the pleasures including the attainment of heavenly bliss. After blessing Mrikandu with a son named Mārkandeya, Lord Siva cut short the life-span of the latter. But, when the father surrendered at the Lord's feet, did He not chase away Yama who came to snatch Mārkandeya's life? When Seeta wailed aloud wondering who was going to protect her from Rāvana, it was Jatāyu, a father unto me, who came forward to help. He fought relentlessly with the cruel and wicked Rāvana, and died a divine death. Does this not apply to me? *One who fails to protect the life of a person who has sought refuge, one who has forgotten the timely help rendered and is ungrateful to the benefactor, and one who calls the true God (the very essence of the scriptures) false, will be thrown into hell for eternity.* The vow voluntarily taken by me

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that I would kill Rāvana who was harming the Devas, was not because he would seize Seeta later on. I took the vow only because I had assured protection to the innumerable sages who surrendered to me. Can I go back on my word? Whether we are able to do what we plan or not, for all compassionate persons, the greatest quality is to offer protection to those who seek it. Countless kings in the past have given up their lives for the sake of protecting those who had surrendered, though some of them were bad. Therefore, when once somebody surrenders to me, it is my bounden duty to grant him asylum. Only your love for me made you turn down Vibheeshana's request. What is there to discuss hereafter? O Sugreeva, you yourself must go and bring that blemishless Vibheeshana here."

Rāma's explanation cleared all the doubts of Sugreeva. Before he sped to Vibheeshana (the embodiment of truth), Tumindan (the younger brother of Mayindan), a vānara warrior, went to Vibheeshana in advance and told him that Sugreeva with two mountain-like shoulders, was coming to take him to noble Rāma. Vibheeshana who was in doubt whether he would be accepted by Rāma, became happy and advanced towards Sugreeva. *While mean-minded persons despite long and close association fail to be sincere to each other, virtuous and great persons immediately on seeing one another, tend to mingle as good friends. Thus Sugreeva and Vibheeshana, both possessing steely shoulders, embraced each other, like the night embracing the day.* Sugreeva told Vibheeshana, "Rāma with his lotus eyes, in accordance with the traditions of the Solar dynasty, has granted faultless asylum to you. Please proceed at once to worship his sacred feet." Even before the words of leonine Sugreeva entered Vibheeshana's ears, his dark eyes shed tears of joy. His body, too, became cool like his mind. The hair all over his body stood erect in ecstasy. Vibheeshana exclaimed, "I am the accursed brother of that deceitful Rāvana who separated delicate Seeta from Rāma. Despite that, he has granted me asylum. *When the Lord of the world, Rāma, has showered mercy on a cur like me, I have attained eminence like the deadly poison consumed by Lord Siva.* The lustful Rāvana refused to heed my truthful words. If this is the compassion of Rāma, it only means the end of the Rākshasās which makes me sad! Will not the sun rolling in the sky move boldly over Lanka henceforth? Will the Rākshasās ever survive? *Even when the wicked inflict harm, the noble-minded never fail to render help. Did not the ocean of milk when churned by the Mandara mountain, give the nectar of immortality to the Devas in bygone days?* Compassionate Rāma (the noble ascetic) has treated me as his kin and granted me asylum. I have

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come out of the sin of being born in the clan of sinful and senseless Rākshasās. I have also escaped from going to hell." Sugreeva, the son of the bright-rayed Soorya, told Vibheeshana, "Righteous Rāma who examines the virtues and vices of every individual in the world, is of the firm conviction that he should protect as his own life anyone who surrenders to him. This blemishless Rāma is eagerly awaiting you. Please proceed without any delay." Like a dark mountain moving along with the golden Meru, Vibheeshana and Sugreeva, reaping the rewards of their past virtuous deeds, reached the valiant Rāma.

Vibheeshana saw Rāma looking like a black sea full of lotuses, with Lakshmana by his side holding a bow and standing guard. In the midst of the army of vānaras, Rāma appeared as if he were resting here after leaving his serpent-bed in response to the appeal of the Devas! On the beach full of sand shining like pearls, and by the side of the sea with waves resembling the curved eyebrows of Seeta, the dark-complexioned Rāma against the background of a pleasant white surface, looked like the dark eyes of Seeta with her lustrous forehead. *Resembling dark moist clouds bereft of sunlight or rainbows, Rāma was seen with his chest and handsome shoulders unadorned by gem-set ornaments.* The sight was like the Mandara mountain freed from the serpent Vāsuki. Rāma's face looked like the white-rayed full moon emitting merciful nectar after shedding light. *Instead of being adorned with the gem-set crown that he had acquired and had willingly given away to Bharata, Rāma's head was seen with the splendour of matted hair as ordered by his stepmother.* On seeing Rāma, Vibheeshana shed tears of joy. His hair stood stiff. His heart melted. Vibheeshana wondered whether Rāma was in fact a mountain of collyrium with red eyes, or a dark cloud with lotus flowers, or Lord Tirumāl, the embodiment of all virtues, or whether the complexion of that God of virtues shedding grace, was black. Vibheeshana was thrilled with the thought, "My brother has helped me to worship the divine feet of Rāma, the father of Lord Brahma, and the brother of Bharata who, rejecting the gem-set crown offered by his mother, preferred the sacred feet of Rāma and thereby freed himself from the chain of births as ephemeral as the life of a glow-worm!" Vibheeshana felt, "Rāma, a remedy for the disease of the cycle of births and deaths which even those who have done great penance cannot get rid of, is about to shoot sharp arrows to kill the Rākshasās. These Rākshasās are therefore as fortunate as the ascetics who have completed their penance!"

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Vibheeshana, with his hands raised over his lustrous gem-set crown, and with a devotion capable of melting even stones and trees, fell flat on the earth, paying obeisance to the divine feet of charitable Rāma who looked at him with grace. *The happy feeling that the agony of his birth had come to an end could be seen on the face of Vibheeshana who was shedding tears of joy.* Offering a seat with his lotus hand, Rāma asked Vibheeshana to rise and sit at ease. He looked at Vibheeshana with compassion and ecstasy, and assured him that as long as the fourteen worlds and his fair name existed, Lanka in the midst of the deep sea, would be his. "I have given the kingdom to you," said Rāma. On hearing these words, all beings in the world shouted, "Our lives are safe." Whether they said these words looking at Rāma's compassion or looking at righteous Vibheeshana who had earned Rāma's divine grace, none could say! Standing before the handsome Rāma, Vibheeshana exclaimed aloud that he had been resurrected. Looking compassionately at Vibheeshana, Rāma said to Lakshmana, "My dear sleepless brother, adorn this faultless Vibheeshana (our good friend who has surrendered) with the crown." Vibheeshana (who knew the future course of events) appealed to Rāma, "O Lord, if you wish to give me the everlasting, glorious kingdom of Lanka (to enable me to sever my relationship with cruel Rāvana), let me be crowned with your sandals with which Bharata was crowned!"

Rāma replied, "You have come to me with love and devotion! Earlier, with Guhan we became five brothers. Then, with Sugreeva, we became six. *Today with your friendship, we have become seven brothers. Your father Dasaratha, by giving me this unapproachable forest, has become great with all his sons."* On hearing these words, Vibheeshana said, "O God! You call me, a despicable cur, a brother. All I can say is that I have been elevated only to serve you as a slave." Relieved of his doubts and fears, Vibheeshana took Rāma's sandals and placed them on his head like a crown. He stood like a mountain with the red-rayed sun on its peak. Looking at Vibheeshana, the king of Rākshasās, Rāma, Lakshmana and all the others became happy. *The unique Devas blessed Vibheeshana and showered flowers on him. The seven seas roared in jubilation. The earth and heaven were filled with joy. The divine drums and conches blared deafeningly. Heavenly golden rains filled the world. The Devas sprinkled fragrant powder. Joyous sounds rose and filled the sky! Lord Brahma was no longer in agony. He felt happy that because of Seeta, his dynasty had regained its lost prestige. The god of dharma declared vociferously that Rāvana's sinful wealth would soon be destroyed.* Rāma told Lakshmana, "Dear brother, for the sake of announcing to one and all that the wealth of the mighty

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kingdom of Rāvana has been acquired by Vibheeshana, I want you and Sugreeva to take him in a procession, surrounded by our big army, along the army camps." Accordingly, virtuous Vibheeshana was seated on a chariot made of sandalwood. He had for his crown, the sandals of Rāma. The chariot was drawn by the vānara leaders. Extolling Vibheeshana as the proud possessor of great wealth which only Devendra deserved, Lakshmana and Sugreeva took him around the camp of the vānara army. *Great sages who endeavour to realise God, finally seek the divine feet of Tirumāl. The water poured by Brahma on these divine feet had flowed as Ganga. Those who take a dip in that pure water will be freed from the five big sins and go to heaven as Devas! When such is the power of the divine feet of Tirumāl, who can describe the greatness derived by Vibheeshana as he wore for his crown, the divine sandals of Rāma? "Till this day, who among saints and great devotees have attained such eminence as Vibheeshana, the king of Lanka?" wondered all great persons assembled there.*

5. INFORMATION ABOUT LANKA

Vibheeshana, the Rākshasa king, returned to Rāma and bowed at his feet. Rāma provided him with a spacious abode to live in. The sun disappeared into the horizon fearing that his rays were too hot! Rāma completed his evening chores, while Manmatha began shooting his flowery arrows. *After the advent of the fire-like red evening, the mighty darkness which had gone into hiding in all directions during the day, came out and spread everywhere as though the black sea water had engulfed the entire world. Like a pond full of blooming flowers, the sky was replete with stars, while Rāma's sacred mind was in constant grief thinking of the beautiful Seeta.* With the spot of darkness inside, the moon rose into the eastern sky with a shaft of light looking like a sword. He spread his net of bright light over the big sea and the world, vowing to find Seeta wherever she was hidden. The roaring sea with mighty waves appeared to rejoice in jubilation because the sea-complexioned Rāma had arrived to construct a bridge with the help of the vānaras! The moonlight spread itself like milk on the white sandy beach which resembled the skin shed by the age-old sea! The southern breeze thenral, looking like a tiger with the 'teeth' of fragrant jasmine flowers, possessing the sting of the black bee and honey-coloured eyes, came out of the mountain cave with an angry sigh. Manmatha's arrow and the sharp sword of moonlight, pierced the heart of Rāma who had once pierced Vāli's heart, Khara, and the seven tall trees. *Rāma would look at his own body (affected by the moonlight) and the southern breeze. Then*

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he would think of Seeta, the prime cause of his weakness and would think of his present agony. Without seeing anything else, he would look at the sea which was preventing him from achieving victory. He would then look towards the island of Lanka, the abode of the thief Rāvana, and finally he would look at his own mighty bow. He would become mad unable to forget Seeta with her exquisite ornaments and mouth full of pearly teeth.

When Rāma was in such a sorrowful mood, Sugreeva told him, "You who can think and act, why should you worry? Why are you not planning the future course of action in consultation with Vibheeshana?" Recovering from his dejection, Rāma asked the vānaras to fetch the virtuous Vibheeshana. When he came, Rāma asked him, "How is the palace situated inside Lanka surrounded by the sea? Please tell me about the strength of Rāvana, the might and size of the army, and the heroic deeds performed by Hanuman in Lanka." *When the knowledgeable Vibheeshana rose to reply, Rāma asked him to be seated.* Raising his hands in obeisance to Rāma and answering all his queries in an impeccable manner, Vibheeshana said, "Vāyu (father of Hanuman) had taken a vow to break the indestructible Meru. Accordingly, he wrested the golden mountain with its three peaks and threw the same into the tidal sea. That is now Lanka. The huge wall surrounding Lanka is seven hundred yōjanas long and a hundred yōjanas deep. O eternal Lord, just as the world is surrounded by the Cakravala mountain, Lanka is surrounded by that great wall which goes upwards beyond the sky where the sun and moon move. *The lifetime of a person is not enough to describe in detail either the deceptive workmanship on the walls of the fortress, or the engineering skill, or the weapons, or the defence mechanisms inside the wall.* Why so many words? You will see for yourself that Lanka is fully protected by the very sea serving as a moat. The guards in front of the northern gateway of Lanka are warriors who will never retreat. Mightier than Yama, they are sixteen crores in number. They resemble Lord Siva who has Nandi as His mount. The fierce guards on the western region are two crores more than those in the northern region. If they were to see Yama with their furious eyes at close quarters, they would snuff out his life as well. Those who guard the southern gate are over sixteen crores in number and are considered most cruel. They can dethrone even Yama. Those who guard the eastern region are sixteen crores in number. They are so mighty that they can forcefully catch hold of the legs of the mountain-like elephants stationed in the eight directions and fling them to the earth. While the cruel Rākshasās keeping vigil with unblinking eyes are thirty two

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crores in number, there are countless merciless Rākshasās who are hiding in disguise just to watch the entry of the Devas into Lanka. The number of Rākshasās who are wide awake, moving like eagles and guarding the long wall of the fort, is a thousand crores. Such well-guarded fortresses are three in number.

"I must also tell you of the unique protection given to that city. The wicked Rākshasās who are employed for this purpose are ninety crores in number. Besides them, those on whom distinction and wealth have been conferred by Rāvana, those who have taken to evil ways and those who support and implicitly obey his commands, are another sixteen crores. The guards who keep vigil at the gates of palaces resembling Mount Meru, possess furious red eyes which look more like poison! These Rākshasās, sixty-four crores in number, are so duty conscious that their eyes do not even blink. The Rākshasās on duty in the shining courtyard of the huge palace of Rāvana can displace all the worlds put together. Mightier than mountains, they are several crores in number. *The number of chariots in Lanka is ten thousand padumams, each padumam consisting of several thousand chariots. The number of mountainous elephants is double the number of chariots. The number of horses with sturdy legs is double the number of elephants. The number of camels is double the number of horses. Why chatter about the strength of the devilish army of Rāvana? His forces exceeding a thousand vellams will remain undestroyed even if all the days in this world get exhausted.* As for the bodyguards who protect Rāvana to whom Lord Siva gifted His sword, they have endless prowess and boons secured as rewards for severe penances. Rāvana has an aide, known as Akamban. He did penance for many long years and obtained great boons. He has no occupation other than participating in battles! He has a huge army and is capable of swallowing the tidal sea. He looks like Lord Narasimha without his nails and teeth! There is another mighty friend of Rāvana known as Nikumban possessing a cavalry (capable of jumping over mountains) and an army of elephants, chariots and furious infantry holding bows and arrows. He defeated Agni when he opposed him. There is yet another assistant to Rāvana, called Kumban. The strength of his great army is ten crores, consisting of divisions of elephants, horses and chariots. He imprisoned the Siddhas, a sect of the Devas. He is more cruel than the pralaya sun. There is another hero by name Mahōdaran who has an army of ten crores of chariots drawn by fiends, lions, zebras and asses. The deceptive acts that he is capable of, would confuse even his mother! Rāvana has yet another aide known as Yāgasatru, the enemy of yāgas. He is the leader of twenty crores of tribal warriors

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living in the hills. He would eat people alive, as if to assert that those who are alive today will not be alive tomorrow! He has defeated the Devas, many a time in the past."

Vibheeshana went on describing several brave commanders in the army of Rāvana. "Sooryasatru (enemy of the sun) who is capable of putting an end to the lives of those in heaven and earth, has a batallion of eight crores equipped with lustrous weapons. If he were to stare fiercely with his red eyes, even fire would be frightened. Māpakkan, mightier than a mountain, is so ferocious that even the Devas, eminent sages and the Trinity of Gods would talk only after ensuring that he was not around! He is the commander of a mighty army consisting of sixteen crores of warriors. Vajradantan, an enemy of Lord Yama, has a face like the scorching midday sun. He is the great commander of troops numbering eight crores. He is so strong and sturdy that even the three-eyed Lord Siva cannot vanquish him. Unbeatable Pisāsan, who frightens his enemies, commands ten crores of troops. He would rush and annihilate celestials, knead their bodies and smell them. Dunmukhan is the commander of a very big battalion of rolling chariots, platoons of elephants, cavalry and infantry with the finest archers, numbering in all fourteen crores. Capable of digging the earth, Dunmukhan spits fire when he talks, and is ever opposed to the path of dharma. Pugaikannan, accustomed to chewing the corpses of warriors, is the commander of a battalion consisting of several crores. He would defeat the celestials and make them take to their heels. Pōrmattan and Vayamattan are comparable to the Mandara mountain. Their armed forces are like a vast sea. There are none in the world as mighty as they are. All the worlds would be ruined by them.

"I cannot say accurately how many thousand commanders there are to fight on the side of Rāvana. There is one supreme commander named Pragattan who controls twice the number of armies I have so far described. Pragattan had showered a continuous flow of arrows from his bow many a time till Irāvatam, the royal elephant of Devendra, jumped onto the seven seas and ran out of fright, and the Devas deserted their abodes and ran away. Rāvana has a younger brother known as Kumbhakarna, who broke the tusks of Irāvatam with his hands. Moving as if the Meru itself had become a rutted elephant, Kumbhakarna used to beat the Devas and roar. There is a furious son of Rāvana who had once imprisoned the sun and the moon. *He is known as Indrajit, because he had conquered and bound Devendra the celestial ruler.* Scars can be seen even now on the legs and shoulders of Devendra. Indrajit has a brother known as Atikāyan. Without bothering whether he would transgress dharma, Atikāyan

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would inflict harm on others. An expert in committing sins, he is endowed with a bow from Lord Brahma. As there is not another Devendra, Atikāyan could not be called Indrajit. Rāvana has three more precious sons called Devarāntakan, Narāntakan and Trisiran. Even the Trinity of Gods will lose their supremacy in a fight with these sons of Rāvana.

"I will now tell you what I know about the prowess of Rāvana. He is the great grandson of Lord Brahma, grandson of Pulastya and son of Vishravas. Rāvana became exalted because of the rare boons he secured from Lord Brahma and Lord Siva after severe penance. To the annoyance of everyone, Rāvana tore the silvery mountain (the abode of Uma Devi and Siva, the Lord of the five elements and everything else) and lifted it to the sky! With his shoulders, Rāvana pressed and broke the tusks of the eight mighty regional elephants which carry the burden of the entire world. Rāvana who strikes terror among the thirty-three crores of Devas, slew Kālakeyan (an Asura) and his sons, by severing their crowned heads with his sword. After this incident, if anyone uttered the name of the king of Lanka, the very foetuses in the wombs of the wives of the Asuras would be frightened like cobras exposed to the vibrations of thunder! On sighting Rāvana, even Kubera of fertile Azhagāpuri, would run away deserting his dignity, vast wealth, victorious gains, rare treasures, and his flowery Vimānam, like a herd of deer fleeing on sighting a tiger. Rāvana with his ten faces, is indeed like Yama, sucking the lives of his foes. During the great fight between Varuna and Rāvana, the latter seized the vast army of Varuna who had to finally hide in the ocean. How can I fully narrate all the victories of Rāvana with shoulders that will not perish even if mountains perish. *Whether he is to be slain today or tomorrow, or a few days hence, it can be done only by you and none else."*

About the prowess of Hanuman, Vibheeshana said, "Countless Rākshasās were overwhelmed by Hanuman at the entrance to the Asōka grove in Lanka. Those who lost their lives through his mighty club are greater in number than the sand particles in the deep sea. Like a herd of sheep driven by a slaying tiger, the Rākshasās became afraid of Hanuman and underwent untold sufferings. The ancient city of Lanka was burnt by Hanuman. Eighty thousand Kinkaras looking like mountains, were annihilated in a battle by the fierce hands, legs, and tail of Hanuman, like the Asuras of Tripura who were once destroyed by Lord Siva. Another warrior, Jambumāli, who opposed Hanuman furiously with a sea-like army, was strangled by his own bow by

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Hanuman and dispatched to the heroes' heaven. *The five commanders of five different types of armies, who in olden days had destroyed the dignity and the defence of the celestial world, were completely wiped out by Hanuman, along with their dark sea-like armies and hordes of relatives, like white ants trampled by the foot of an elephant.* When Hanuman was in utter fury, the heaped pieces of flesh along with the flowing blood from the bodies of Rākshasās killed by him, looked like an island in the midst of an overflowing river. Hanuman caught hold of Akshakumāran seen with the fury of a submarine fire, and flattened him to the ground. The blood-stains on the streets of Lanka can be seen even now. In the city of Lanka, those who were completely annihilated by Hanuman are innumerable. Because of the burning of Lanka by Hanuman, the city was baked with the blood of those destroyed by him. Who is there to describe all this, when even Rāvana, the king of Lanka, with his shining sword could not stay in the city and had to remain in the sky for seven days along with his garlands, ornaments and robes. Later, at Rāvana's behest, Brahma created a new Lanka with the help of the celestial architect Mayan. *O illustrious Rāma, I was inspired to surrender to you not only because I learnt of the slaying of Khara and Vāli by your shining arrows, but also because I witnessed the burning of Lanka by Hanuman and the way he destroyed the Rākshasās in the battle!"*

Rāma heard with attention, all that was said by his friend Vibheeshana. His shoulders which had become thin because of the long separation from the virtuous peacock-like Seeta, swelled in ecstasy. Looking at his messenger, Hanuman, Rāma said, "O hero, from what I learn, you seem to have killed more than half of the army maintained by the enemy. You appear to have scorched the entire city of Lanka. Have you left anything to be done there? Is it to show the prowess of my bow that you did not attempt to redeem the parrot-like Seeta, even after finding her? O hero with golden shoulders, we will now march towards Lanka, the city filled with the heroic deeds of your arms and execute more heroic deeds. But will they confer greatness on us? What fame do we propose to seek by fighting with the armies stationed there and defeated by you? *O Hanuman, you are like the embodiment of all my virtues! You have already taken over my might as well as that of Rāvana. I have given you the place of Lord Brahma who created the three worlds."* When Rāma spoke thus, Hanuman fell at his feet, stood up and remained silent out of shyness. Listening to the narration of Hanuman's victories, all the vānara leaders including their king, Sugreeva, were thrilled as if they had attained heavenly bliss.

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6. SEEKING PASSAGE FROM VARUNA

Rāma addressed Vibheeshana, "O scholar! It will not be a difficult task for us to win even if all the three worlds collectively oppose us in war. We can easily destroy our enemies with the might of our shoulders. But, the cruel sea is between us and Lanka. Think of a way and tell me how our army can reach Lanka." Vibheeshana replied, "The sea is well aware of the disguise of Lord Tirumāl as Rāma. The sea itself owes its existence to Sagaras, your ancestors, and is bound to grant whatever boon you seek. Please pray to the tidal sea that our armies be allowed passage through it to reach Lanka." Accepting the advice, Rāma, accompanied by Sugreeva, Vibheeshana, Hanuman and others, reached the sea-shore. *The sun emerged from the eastern horizon. The world was released from darkness (the foe of the sun) like the moon from the mouth of Rāhu. Rāma, the sea of grace, sat on the sacrificial darbhai grass facing the dark sea, and chanted hymns to propitiate Varuna the sea-lord, to grant passage to him and his army to march across and liberate Seeta.*

Dust settled on Rāma's body and the rays of the blemishless sun fell on his handsome face, while he continued to sit on the sacrificial grass. The passing of a day, seemed to be an eternity. Seven such days passed, and yet there was no response from Varuna who neither acceded to Rāma's request nor rejected it. Upset by Varuna's sheer indifference, the ever-graceful Rāma became as furious as the submarine fire. He felt, "Varuna is aware of my sorrow. Even after my prayers to him, if he remains silent, it only means a refusal." His red-lotus eyes became redder! He heaved a fiery sigh. His eyebrows became arched looking like bent bows! Laughing furiously, he thought, "If a person free from desires, seeks a favour from another and the latter does not oblige, it shows his mean-mindedness. Varuna has refused me and my army, passage, in spite of my fervent appeal. How wonderful is his conduct! With my wife taken away by Rāvana, Varuna has probably concluded that I am a coward holding a worthless bow. He has only exposed his dry heart. *If we seek something from another, we must either propitiate the giver, or fight, win and acquire what we seek.* I wanted to achieve my object by persuasion. Having failed in my attempt, I shall now create a passage through the sea without Varuna's permission, though it is against natural laws."

Rāma felt, "Probably Varuna thinks that with fruits and vegetables as my food in the forest, my sinews have become weak. The celestials will now witness who is superior — the proud lord of the sea full of fishes, or this small man holding a bow!

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I could have effortlessly dried up the ocean with my arrows. I did not do so only because I was afraid of being censured, and so I prayed to Varuna to be allowed passage. This has been mistaken for weakness. The seven seas which have ignored my appeal will be scorched and reduced to dust. The five elements will prostrate themselves before me begging for protection. My army of vānaras will march fearlessly through the dry sea towards Lanka. *Great saints possessing true knowledge will not be recognised if they come to this world without wealth. Those who are used to seeing petty mindedness will be impressed only by exrtraordinary feats."* Rāma lost his humility. His face became fierce like the pralaya sun. Several times he called for his bow. His brother, Lakshmana, with a heavy heart and blood-shot eyes emitting sparks of fire, gave the bow to him. After obtaining the fierce bow with arrows, Rāma tied the quiver to his mighty mountain-like shoulders. Putting on his gloves, he twanged the string of his bow. The loud sound that arose put an end to the 'love quarrel' of Lord Siva and His consort! From his quiver, Rāma selected sharp arrows, more numerous than big raindrops, scorching like the fierce rays of the pralaya sun. The arrows were capable of sucking all the water from below the earth. Rāma pulled the string of his sturdy crescent-moon-like bow which was as mighty as the seven high mountains, and shot fierce burning arrows which were thrice as furious as the all-consuming wildfire. The fire that came from Rāma's arrows converted the fishes, snakes and huge mountains in the sea into 'firewood' and scorched everything else. The foam from the sea water turned into 'ghee'. The pits in the sea looked like pits for sacrificial fires.

The arrows shot by Rāma from his well-bent sturdy bow, sped towards their objects through the seven seas spitting fire. Smoke, rose up furiously like the pralaya fire, and finally fled beyond the Cakravala mountains removing the darkness prevailing there. The long arrows shot by Rāma fell on the sea, like fire and thunderbolt, making the sharks in it turn unconscious and float. Because of the series of flames of fire burning together, the clouds melted and fell down. The smoke which rose from beyond the boundaries of the sea into the heavens, made the dark hair of the celestial dancers ash-coloured. Rāma's red arrows pierced the fishes, instantly killing them and spilling blood. *The whales and their offspring were sliced into several pieces and thrown on the surface of the sea.* The fire spread everywhere with ash flying above and burning the mountains. Billions of arrows pierced the sea, turning it into a mire which was eventually scorched, making the hoods of Ādisesha in the nether world visible. *The flames of Rāma's burning arrows annihilated all the fishes in the sea like the family of a person tendering false evidence is annihilated.* Rows of big fishes

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with arrows stuck to their bodies, floated on the sea like long catamarans with masts. The proximity of the fire to the flow of blood from the aquatic creatures, made the immeasurable wide sea look like the evening twilight. A few of the large shoals of fishes were scorched by Rāma's penetrating arrows, a few became black and others were literally fried! The black sea with the burning fire looked like a mud lamp with a burning wick. With the sea slowly becoming dry, heaps of precious lustrous gems surfaced.

As Rāma's arrows evaporated the sea, varieties of fishes were found fried and stuck in the mire, like charred roots. The arrows dashed against each other and gave out fire which burnt the fishes like the fire in a bamboo forest! The blood shed from the sliced bodies of the creatures of the sea, flowed like waves. The boiling water overflowing onto the shore splashed over the roots of big trees and mountains and scalded them like hot oil. *The fierce arrows shot by the divine Rāma, reached their targets faster than the mind, and sped like the curse of Lord Brahma.* With intermittent flames rising from the sea, it looked like a pond full of blooming lotus flowers. *It is said that the anger of noble ones leaves behind a trail of greatness. Similarly, the salty sea owing to the wrath of Rāma, was relieved of the great accusation that its water was salty, and became a sea of arrows filled with sweet water!* It was after all not an extraordinary feat for Rāma (Lord Tirumāl who had swallowed the worlds one after the other) to squeeze out the water of the sea with his arrows. The scriptures state that during pralaya, it is only fire that consumes the widespread sea-water that destroys the world! This was now proved by Rāma. *Sages with great yāgas to their credit, who stayed in the sea day and night dwelling upon the divine feet of the Lord, were spared by the hot fire and were able to walk over the sea without suffering.* Owing to huge clouds of smoke accumulating in the southern, western and other regions, the horses of the sun's chariot lost their bright complexion, turned black, and halted.

The birds in the visible horizon went after their intimate female partners, but the female birds were caught by the fire emanating from the arrows shot by Rāma. *On learning about the fate of their mates, the male birds felt sad that even though Rāma had known the pangs of separation, he seemed to be ignorant of their suffering.* These birds voluntarily fell into that fire and gave up their lives! The celestials were engulfed by a cloud of smoke. Their unblinking eyes blinked, and their bodies began to sweat. *The swans (which had attracted censure for their inability to walk as daintily*

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as Seeta) unable to escape, perished like the pride of Varuna. All the birds living in that big wide sea flew towards the sky. As the fire had spread even there, these birds were burnt and fell down on the earth. Those that did not die had burns all over their bodies. Surrounded by flames of fire, they had to flee. They took away all the white pearls mistaking them for their eggs. The sea-monkeys felt that they were cursed because they had foolishly taken the charitable Rāma to be a mere man, and jumped into the sky showing their teeth. *Rāma's arrows, though short like Sage Agastya, were close to one another, spitting fire and always going in the right direction.* They bore mystic powers, were furious, took different forms, and drank the sea water!

The golden walls of Lanka melted, the earth was scorched and the Asoka grove was burnt by the fire created by the arrows shot by Rāma at the sea with dashing waves. The citizens of Lanka feared that Hanuman had returned. The golden mountain of Lanka known as Trikootamalai which shone like the sun, melted like gold, bled, and looked like a red flower. Mountainous whales unable to stay in the boiling sea jumped onto the land with their bodies quivering. The burnt black heaps of corals resembled heaps of charcoal. After drying up the water in the sea, the burning arrows of Rāma entered the serpent world removing the darkness there like the sun. Rāma's arrows burnt not only the dark sea but also pierced through the impregnable universe and went beyond. When the sea dried up, heaps of red gems were seen like blood coming out of the body! The sea-snakes in the crevices of the dried sea-bed looked like the bowels of the sea that had come out. The dry sea with its lustrous gems looked like a jewel box. *While Rāma had shot a hundred thousand arrows into the hills cutting them into a hundred thousand crore pieces, each pearl in the sea was now cut into a hundred pieces! All who were shot dead by Rāma's arrows attained heavenly bliss.* Rāma's fatal arrows surrounded the sea on all sides. Mother Earth who was in her 'blue saree' was now seen in an exquisite embroidered one! The big column of fire created by Rāma's arrows rose like the destructive sea seen during pralaya! Unable to bear the oppressive heat caused by the flames moving upwards from the sea, the Devas left their world and went over to the Satyaloka of Lord Brahma and stayed there. When such was the fate of the celestials, the plight of the mortals could well be imagined. *Wanting Varuna to present himself quickly, Rāma took out the Brahmāstram dedicated to the four-faced Lord Brahma, chanted the appropriate mantra and shot it, making even the Devas nervous.* Instantly, the cluster of clouds raised a furore. Varuna wept bitterly. His mouth became dry. All the rivers in the world got choked. The eight regions feared that none would survive. The sea

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beyond the bottom of the earth boiled. The divine River Ganga contained in the tuft of Lord Siva suffered from excessive heat. Even the water in Lord Brahma's sacred jug boiled, not to speak of the water in the seven seas!

Lord Tirumāl had graciously created the worlds and had contained them within Himself. Varuna had not realised that Rāma was but an incarnation of that great Tirumāl. The Devas felt that even the Rākshasās were more humane than Varuna who refused to come out despite the anger of the Lord. When Rāma, who had brought forth all the worlds (with Himself in everyone of them) was angry, the four other elements, namely, the earth, fire, air and sky, became anxious about how they would survive his fury, and reproached Varuna. Engulfed by the rising flames and smoke, Varuna could not trace his path. He wept bitterly. His eyes lost their grace. Fearing Rāma's wrath, he soon came before him with folded hands and extolled him. *Crossing the scorched black sea as if walking on fire, Varuna, the lord of the sea (once-full-of-waves) , arrived in agony, with a scorched head, a perplexed mind, a melting face and apologetic words, seeking his way like a blind person in the midst of encircling smoke.* Addressing Rāma, he said, "You are the Supreme Lord of the flawless world. If you are angry, is there any protective shield for me other than your divine feet? Do I possess any strength of my own? My only security is the protection I receive from you. *O Lord of the Scriptures, you are the sea as well as the fire scorching it. You are everything else. You cause pralaya. You are also the world consumed by it. You are the very life among all these. You are eternal. Being your slave, will I forget you? The flaming red fire has engulfed me. Please save me. O creator of all worlds, you create, protect and finally destroy all the worlds through fire. Or else, you will yourself consume them. There is nothing impossible for you.* If you so desire, a single sharp arrow will be enough for you to scorch and destroy the world completely. For a cur like me, do you require so many arrows? *O burning flame of the region of the sun who can slice the forest of darkness with the sword of hot rays!* O prime cause for the survival of the Scriptures! O ancient Lord! Please save me. O ocean of compassion! You can conceal all the worlds without the knowledge of anyone. When the elephant, Gajendra, prayed to you for succour, you flew to him and saved him. Salutations to you. *You are my mother, father, and everything else. You are the beginning, the middle and the end. You are my great fortune, as well as my irreparable loss. What use is there in saying that I have humiliated you? Even though you are God, you have not realised it yourself. How can I, just a cur, understand you?"*

As an offering to Rāma, Varuna placed a lustrous garland, (whose brightness

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would humble the divine sun) on the ground. Praying to Rāma, he said, "O Lord with a thousand names, if lesser beings inflict harm, it is for greater beings to bear it!" With these words, Varuna came out in his full stature like a big mountain in flames, fell at Rāma's feet and sought his refuge. Rāma's excessive anger began to ebb, like boiling milk sprinkled with water. He told Varuna, "I am no longer angry. Do not fear. I am granting you refuge. It was only because of my love for you that I respectfully prayed to you to be allowed passage. But you did not appear. Your absence infuriated me. Tell me why you come to me now after seeing my anger." Paying obeisance to Rāma, Varuna said, "I knew of what happened to your virtuous, divine, wife Seeta (more patient than even Mother Earth) only from you and not even from the Devas. O virtuous Lord, I had gone to mediate in a fight between the sharks of the tidal sea. I came here of my own accord, unaware of your commands." When Rāma asked Varuna to specify a target for his imperishable arrow, Varuna replied, "The hundred crore Avunars living in the island of Marukāntaram are very cruel, and the world would perish if all of them begin to eat. They are also harmful to me. Please aim your lustrous arrow at these cruel creatures."

The unique Rāma directed his arrow to proceed and annihilate the Avunars. It instantly destroyed them, reduced the island of Marukāntaram to ashes and returned to Rāma. *The righteous will always be blessed with goodness. The great wrath of Rāma directed against the innocent and righteous Varuna, did not ultimately do any harm to him, but made only the wicked Avunars suffer. Rāma's arrow was as infallible as the curse of a glowing Védic sage.* Rāma told Varuna, "Through your words, you sought refuge in me and I am relieved of my anger. I will be blamed, if I do not kill the Rākshasās who are holding the surrounding sea for their protection. Therefore allow me passage through the sea." Varuna replied, "O eternal Lord, this world made up of seven great islands has no boundary. Even as the lord of this sea, it is impossible for me to measure with accuracy its depth and breadth. If you wish to go to Lanka after the water of the sea becomes dry, it will take a long time and your army will lose its enthusiasm. If the sea water is made to solidify instead of being allowed to go dry, all the beings in it will die. *Therefore, please construct a bridge (Sétu) over me with stones, which I shall bear for a boundless length of time.* You can then proceed happily to Lanka." Accepting Varuna's suggestion, Rāma ordered, "To sustain the pride of the deep sea, let it be filled up with mountains and the Sétu built. Rāma then left. Varuna, too, returned to his abode with the blessings of Rāma.

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7. BUILDING THE SÉTU

Seated amidst Vibheeshana and countless wise companions, Sugreeva sent for the vānara, Nalan, who was a great architect. When he arrived, Sugreeva said, "We have to build a Sétu across the tidal sea." Nalan replied, "O son of Soorya! Provide me with rocks and other materials and I will build a strong and compact Sétu." Sugreeva agreed to do so and conveyed his mind to Jāmbavan who ordered the beating of drums, and announced loudly, "For the purpose of building a Sétu, let all (except Lakshmana, Rāma, Vibheeshana and Sugreeva) assemble on the shores of this sea." The vānaras came in large numbers, carrying in their hands huge black hills. *It appeared as though, for the sake of bridging one sea, the other six seas, in the guise of vānaras, were pressed into service!* Vānaras swarmed everywhere. Some of them carried the hills over their heads. A few of them threw the hills into the sea and filled it. A few others rejoiced aloud while doing these acts. Some vānaras rolled a few mountains with their legs, lifted the heavier ones with their hands and dragged other huge and lofty mountains with their tails. Nalan, the flawless expert capable of holding single-handed a huge mountain which normally took several monkeys to lift and move, showed his prowess by piling mountains, one over the other, making the sea tremble with fear. *Mighty vānaras excavated huge mountains and threw them towards Nalan who skilfully bore them like Sadayappan of Tiruvennainallur who bore the burden of those who sought his protection.* The commanders of the big army of victorious monkeys, with the object of uprooting huge mountains where the moon crawled, shook them with their feet chasing away the cluster of clouds around them. The long mountains thrown by the vānara commanders, fell one over the other into the sea. The resultant flames made Varuna fear and wonder from where the fire arose! A monkey named Ānirakannan brought a mountain on his palm and threw it with great force into the dark sea. This caused varieties of white pearls along with drops of water to rise into the sky. Big mountains containing bamboos and honeycombs were thrown by monkeys into the dark, tidal sea, causing the water to rise into the sky and making it rain in heaven, too! The elephants (in the mountains) flung into the sea, shrieked when caught by crocodiles with cruel mouths, like Gajendra, praying to Lord Tirumāl for relief.

Mountains full of nectar-shedding flowers, sandalwood trees, aquila logs and other fragrant materials were thrown into the sea by the monkeys. Soon, the odorous sea was transformed into a fragrant one like a pot of aromatic water. A lofty mountain

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full of mango and other fruit-bearing trees, was hurled into the sea by a vānara. This provided ample food to the fishes in the sea by way of fruits, honey and flowers. *It was like a philanthropist who continues to be charitable even after gifting away everything. Some of the mountains thrown by the monkeys got stuck in the bed of the sea with all the attendant mountain wealth, and were of no benefit to anyone. These were like misers who never give their riches to anyone. The big snakes in the sea swallowed the valiant elephants in the mountains and slept with their mouths wide open like fools who are unaware of their predicament even after some misfortune strikes them.* In one of the mountains thrown into the sea, a rutted tusker with a punctured trunk, and a shark from the sea, fought violently like thunderous pralaya clouds clashing against each other! The vānara warriors threw a series of mountains into the sea, one after the other, all of which broke into several pieces. *These small pieces rose to the heights of the celestial world and (unable to remain there) dropped down, like dead persons who do little good fail to remain for long in heaven. Ferocious lions and wild tigers living in the mountains, when thrown into the sea were subdued and killed by sharks with sharp teeth, demonstrating how even a mighty person, when displaced, can be defeated by a weakling.* The fish in the sea jumped skywards and drank the honey from the honeycombs dangling from the top of the mountains thrown into the sea. *The honey thus consumed could be compared to one's wealth useful to others even in the absence of a charitable disposition!* The speed with which the vānaras threw the mountains into the sea, made the bamboos in them disgorge pearls. These pearls mingled with the pearls released from the mouths of oysters, and the pearls showered by the right-whorled conches. When huge mountains touching the sky were uprooted and dumped into the sea, all the water from the sea overflowed onto the earth, converting the sea into land and the land into sea. *Mountains (with wild lions and tigers) thrown into the sea, converted it into a hilly tract, showing how, if God wills it, one object can be transformed into another in no time.*

While the mountain animals thrown into the sea starved because they could not eat seafood, there were no animals which were not eaten by the sharks in the sea! *None of the animals deserted the mountains uprooted by the monkeys, just as sincere offspring brought up by their elders cling on to them lovingly even when these elders are forcibly carried away by others.* The big mountains used to be ideal places offering shelter to saintly sages. Though they loved these mountains, they were not furious with the monkeys for uprooting them to construct the Sétu, because they were fully aware of the

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immense good that was in store for the virtuous. But the Rākshasās living on flesh and residing in the mountains thrown into the sea, held their hands over their heads and moved to Lanka. Wild beasts partly submerged in the sea, resembled a garland on the two sides of the flawless Sétu. Alongside the red rocks where red gems shone brightly, a number of black rocks were heaped. It looked as though, because Varuna gave away his gem-set chain, compassionate Rāma gave him a multi-coloured chain! *The snakes which fell into the sea along with the rocks thrown by the vānaras, returned to their caves in the rocks like saints tracing their bodies and entering them again.*

How wonderful was the Sétu! For instance, the mountain thrown by Hanuman resulted in drops of water splashing into the sky enabling the fish to enjoy heavenly bliss. The big mountain thrown by Neelan attacked the deep base of the earth. Consequently a great deal of water came up. The shores of the sea being small, the sea water rose with a loud noise and spread all over the world. One of the monkeys threw a big mountain containing several yōjanas of waterfalls, into the sea, causing the flowing of sea-water into the streets of Lanka full of mansions with lofty flags. Mayindan, another vānara-warrior, threw a big mountain into the sea resulting in sea-water flushing all the eight directions and forcing the eight regional elephants to desert their places in panic. Angada, the son of Vāli, uprooted a mighty mountain (which could withstand even Lakshmana's arrow) and threw it into the sea, churning it. Jāmbavan threw a mountain (as mighty as Hanuman's shoulders) into the sea with such force that the water rose to the celestial regions drenching the heads of the Devas. Kumudan threw a mountain into the sea with the sound of a rhythmic dance. The Devas rejoiced and danced with the hope that nectar would come again from the ocean of milk. When Panasan threw a big mountain with the speed of a thunderbolt into the sea, the furious serpent-king Ādisesha, unable to bear the weight of the mountain, decided to end his life and undertook a fast. Countless herds of bears, threw a number of mountains one against another. *They were all reduced to powder like the dissipation of any effort not associated with punyam!*

Nalan, the architect, arranged the mountains symmetrically without any undulations. He assembled them straight filling sand over them. The cluster of mountains carried by millions of vānaras were received by Nalan with his long arms resembling iron pillars. The mountains that slipped from his hands, were caught by his legs. *A number of vānaras who carried the mountains on their heads had to stand still for want of moving space, as if, in addition to the Sétu across the tidal sea, there was another Sétu in the making, over*

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the heads of the monkeys! As there was no space to move, some vānaras swam across the sea carrying the mountains over their heads. A few of them with weak legs and hungry stomachs, put down the mountains they were carrying and drank honey from them till they became intoxicated. Countless saffron trees, plenty of honey shed from the mountain-caves, and clusters of beautiful multi-coloured flowers adorning the mountains thrown into the sea converted it into a big ocean of honey! *Just as virtuous persons hailing from noble families do not lose heart even when afflictions repeatedly overtake them, the roaring sea was unconcerned though many big mountains were thrown into it.* Clusters of corals which spread like flames on the mountains, along with other precious gems shed lustre like the rainbow. *When the vānaras uprooted a banyan tree inhabited by birds, these birds grieved like relatives grieving over the death of the head of their family who had been giving succour to all of them.* The trees, which had been consistently giving honey to the bees, fell into the sea. The bees having lost their benefactor, roamed about like mendicants without support. Clusters of bees were encircling three mighty elephants, feigning love for them. *But when these elephants entered the roaring sea along with the mountains, the bees deserted them like prostitutes; whereas, the creepers, though they were uprooted from the ground and suffered a great deal, stuck on, woven around the trees, like flawless virtuous women.*

In three days, the Sétu extending up to the Trikoota mountain in Lanka, was completed. The vānaras became so excited over the Sétu that their roar rent the sky. *The Sétu which looked like the serpent Ādisesha, seemed to be declaring, "When I am here to carry out the commands of Rāma, the Supreme Lord, why should he seek the help of others? Let Rāma march on my back to relieve the agony of Seeta." It looked as if the truthful and tender lady known as Lanka, unable to bear the agony caused to Rāma by the deceitful Rāvana, was affectionately stretching her hand out to receive the vānara troops mustered by Rāma. The Sétu also resembled the celestial Ganga coming down and resting in the sea with the noble thought, "Which river including me has the merit of helping Rāma's army to march across the black sea, except the Sétu?" The bright light from the cluster of gems from the mountains sunk in the ocean made the Sétu look like a rainbow resting during the night after the exit of the sun.* With the completion of the Sétu, Sugreeva and Vibheeshana along with the rest of the leaders paid obeisance to Rāma and told him that the Sétu which was a hundred yōjanas long and ten yōjanas wide, had been constructed across the sea.

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8. QUESTIONING THE SPIES

With his long hands, noble Rāma affectionately embraced Sugreeva and the others who conveyed to him the sweet news of the completion of the Sétu. With a great desire to see how it was built, Rāma asked all of them to join him and went to the bridge. *Coming like a cloud from the sea of an army, Rāma stood before the Sétu experiencing the ecstasy of love as if he had seen Seeta!* Gazing at the Sétu, Rāma said in wonder, "When our army has been able to construct a Sétu across this unfathomable sea, we would have reached Lanka even if it had been beyond the seven seas!" With Vibheeshana, the lord of the Rākshasās leading the troops, with Hanuman, the great scholar following them, and with Lakshmana just behind him, Rāma of handsome long hands walked on the Sétu like a black elephant. *Looking like the River Kāveri flowing with gems, flower garlands and waves (with groves on the two banks), the huge army marched on the Sétu.* The army of vānaras could be compared to the River Ponni, as the army proceeded towards the sea, carrying with it pure food grown on mountain and other tracts. Among the vānaras who marched one behind the other, a few walked through the waves; and when the waves rose up, such vānaras moved like the horses galloping in the sky. While walking on the Sétu, for want of adequate space, one vānara would dash against another! Many warriors held sandalwood and other trees as umbrellas over Rāma, protecting him from the hot rays of the sun. The army leaders cut flower-bearing trees, added fragrant materials, made chowries and waved the same to take care that the sacred body of Rāma, the embodiment of the Védas, did not suffer from fatigue. Constantly thinking of the pining Seeta who had even cast away her bangles, Rāma crossed the tidal sea with his devastating army and reached the opposite shore. Accompanied by Lakshmana and the rest, Rāma stayed on a hill, on the outskirts of the city of Lanka where Seeta (worshipped even by Arundati) was imprisoned!

Looking pleasantly at Neelan, Rāma asked him to make arrangements for pitching military camps for the army. Neelan conveyed this to Nalan. A suitable place was selected by him and was divided into four. A square was formed. Camps were constructed by Nalan for all without distinction. He also built abodes with gold and lustrous gems for King Sugreeva and the others, making even his father Viswakarma feel ashamed of his own workmanship! Wanting to build an appropriate shelter for Rāma, Nalan selected suitable rocks from mountains and laid them evenly without any undulations. He made pillars with mature bamboos and put up a hut with soft grass and fragrant flowers. Everyone conveyed their sincere good wishes to Rāma, the

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very embodiment of motherly affection, and left for their respective places in all eight directions. Rāma, too, entered his 'hermitage'. Owing to the huge mountains sunk into the sea by the vānaras, the sun who shone with bright rays, dipped into the salty sea, lost his lustre and disappeared as if wanting to bathe in the fresh water beyond the horizon! The crescent moon began to shine brightly in the west. The moon resembled the curved bow of Manmatha, shooting 'arrows' at Rāma the proud possessor of lotus eyes. For Rāma, the cool moon, fanned by the southern breeze carrying fragrant pollen dust from the lotus flower with a hundred petals, was scorching. The rays of the moon that embraced the shoulders of sleepless Rāma were like small fuming snakes crawling on a big empty emerald hill devoid of peacocks. *As the proud city of Lanka came closer and closer, Rāma, the possessor of long and muscular arms, became weaker and weaker.* Even from a distance, the fire known as Seeta (with her coral mouth and beautiful long dark eyes) burnt Rāma, making him lose his strength!

Vibheeshana's long penance had prompted him to surrender to Lord Rāma! Capable of discerning the invisible God as well as life, noble Vibheeshana suddenly saw spies deputed by Rāvana in the guise of monkeys, and caught them as they were roaming about trying to assess the strength of the vānara army. Like a swan which can separate water from milk, Vibheeshana distinguished the spies from the sea of vānaras. Soon, the vānaras tied the hands of the spies with creepers, and hit them hard with their fists till they bled through their mouths. Vibheeshana in the mean time pointed out those deceitful spies to Rāma, the sea of grace. But the noble Rāma did not consider the spies as his enemies. He was concerned that the vānaras had hurt them. He declared that those who surrender to him, even if they had done harm, should not be punished and directed that the spies be released. Moved by the compassion of charitable Rāma, Vibheeshana shed tears. He, however, explained to Rāma that they were not vānaras but spies named Sugan and Sāran deputed by the sinful Rāvana. Refuting the words of knowledgeable Vibheeshana, the deceitful spies in disguise told Rāma, "O great hero with a mighty bow, noticing the great prowess of the army of monkeys and fearing that victory might elude Rāvana, Vibheeshana has only pretended to surrender to you, so that he can kill us one after another. We are only monkeys. This is the truth." Vibheeshana reiterated that they were spies in disguise and said that it could be proved in no time. *The moment he silently recited a mantra, the spies attained their real form and were seen as Rākshasās, like the copper of a silver-plated copper vessel stands exposed by a drop of mercury.*

Rāma, the refuge of the grief-stricken, looked at the gigantic frightened spies

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showing their lustrous and cruel teeth. He smiled, showing his pearly teeth and asked them not to be frightened, but disclose in detail the object of their visit. The Rākshasa spies whose task was to find out details about the enemy camp and convey them to their king, paid their respects to Rāma and said, "Due to our bad fate, we have come here to collect secret information for our king Rāvana, who, not knowing that his wicked act would turn into a deadly disease, is after noble, motherly Seeta." Rāma told the expert spies, "Inform Rāvana that I have given boundless wealth to his younger brother, Vibheeshana. Tell him how the vānara warriors have built a Sétu by filling the sea with mountains. Also, tell Rāvana that champion archers have at last arrived here. Convey to Rāvana that he and his clan were allowed to live till now only because we were unable to find Lanka. Tell Rāvana that, even if he were to be protected by Siva and Tirumāl, he is certain to be cut into several pieces. Tell him that for the sake of my father-like Jatāyu, just as Parasurāma had annihilated Kārtaveeryārjuna (for killing the former's father) with his kith and kin, I will annihilate Rāvana's relatives and armies, kill him, and present his body to the Devas as a sacrificial offering. Tell Rāvana that because he caused agony to chaste Seeta by confining her in a prison, I will consign him and his kin to the imperishable prison of fiery hell after presenting his wealth to Vibheeshana. O spies, you have entered all the battalions and assessed their strength. If you do not indulge in any more harmful acts, you need not fear. You have my assurance." Rāma then directed Vibheeshana to ensure the quick and safe return of the spies to their city, without hurting them either through words, mind or hands! The spies felt relieved and left.

Having come to know of Varuna's fear of Rāma, and how a Sétu was built across the sea, and that Rāma had reached the outskirts of the city, Rāvana remained alone in the night for consultations with his council of ministers. Young Rākshasis and Rākshasās and the rest, steered clear of the consultation chamber. Even the fresh 'thenral' could enter only when beckoned. Hunchbacked bearers, mentally-retarded ones, the deaf and the mute and the crippled, carried a number of lamps and surrounded Rāvana. With his feet adorned with gems fallen from the crowns of Rākshasās who prostrated themselves before him, Rāvana sat amidst his ministers and said that his enemies had moved closer. He wanted to know the necessary steps to be taken. The aged Māliyavān, Rāvana's maternal grandfather, spoke first. He said, "The furious arrows shot by Rāma, resembling the pralaya submarine fire, heated up the sea forcing Varuna to offer a ruby-set necklace to Rāma and worship him. *The news pierced my heart like a trident.* The people of the world commented that the sea was torn like a

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piece of cloth, casting a blemish on Varuna who had to yield and allow passage (to our enemies). *This pained me very much.* The mountains created by God were completely excavated to their very foundations by the vānara warriors. They have now blocked the sea with a Sétu preventing the movement of boats, and are gleefully patting their own shoulders. *All these upset my mind.* O king, countless vānara warriors boiling with rage, lifted mountains according to their physical strength and passed them on to Nalan, who received them on his fingers and laid them over the sea. *This unique feat unnerved me a great deal. After witnessing the burning of our ancient city of Lanka by Hanuman, the construction of a Sétu blocking the sea, the slaying of their enemies, and the arrival of their troops here, what is there for us to think hereafter?"* With sparks of fire coming out of his eyes, Rāvana told Māliyavān, "You, too, better follow Vibheeshana and live for ever." The aged and wise Māliyavān remained silent realising that it was foolish to give good advice. Pragattan, the army commander, after paying obeisance to Rāvana, looked at Māliyavān and said, "O lord, the prowess of our enemies might have been exhibited in their crossing the sea. But are you not aware that the Gods in the eight directions defending the world are subordinate to Rāvana? Out of fear, you extol the monkeys for excavating the mountains and throwing them into the sea. Do you not know that Rāvana had lifted Mount Kailas along with Lord Siva? Foolish men have come to wage a big war against us. No harm will befall us by their arrival. It is fate that has brought them here for their own destruction!"

His eyes sparking fire, a fully dressed gate-keeper, with a stick in his hand, came into the hall and announced the arrival of the spies. The cruel-eyed mighty Rāvana immediately ordered them to be let in. With the frightful memory of the mighty-armed monkeys fresh in their minds, the spies entered the council hall where Rāvana was seated and prostrated themselves before him. Yama-like Rāvana, who had been prattling with the hope of saving his life, looked at the spies and asked them to tell him the extent of the army of vānaras resembling the waves of the sea, the condition of *'that slothful Vibheeshana'*, and the state of Rāma and Lakshmana *'in the garb of ascetics'*. The spies told Rāvana, "Taking the form of monkeys, we crossed the sea in no time and reached the camp of the vānara army unseen by our enemies. We tried to see the entire army, but could not succeed. We were like eagles flying fast in all directions to study the age-old sea. Is it necessary for us to come here and speak of the strength of the enemy army which blocked the sea (with a Sétu) in anguish, unable to see the end of their sea of sorrow? Did not the roar of the rising sea come and tell you of the extent of their army? *After looking sternly at Varuna's initial rebuff, Rāma looked at his own rock-like shoulders, then he looked at his arrows and his bow. That look of Rāma was enough to make the sea boil.*

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"To your younger brother, Vibheeshana, has been given the vast wealth of Lanka surrounded by the sea, lasting as long as the sun, the moon and the great name of Rāma. Hanuman who came here, as an envoy has already 'told' us of the might of Rāma's arms. When that is so, is it proper to think that Rāma has acquired some new-found strength just because a Sétu has been built by him? *Though we were in the guise of monkeys, furious Vibheeshana disclosed our identity to Rāma, just as the sun and the moon had once pointed out the Asuras (who sat in disguise among the Devas to consume the nectar of immortality) to Lord Tirumāl.* We were caught and hit by the monkey warriors with their long hands, and our shoulders were bent. We were finally taken by Vibheeshana to the victorious Rāma. After Vibheeshana explained to Rāma who we were, Rāma asked us to convey to you that he would destroy all the boons secured by you, with his arrows. Even after knowing that we were Rākshasās in the guise of monkeys, Rāma gracefully allowed us to escape alive." The spies also disclosed to Rāvana, all that they heard and saw, and faithfully repeated the words of Rāma. Finally they wished Rāvana long life!

Rāvana said, "Like a curse, these men holding deadly bows in their hands, have blocked the sea with a Sétu, crossed it with their army, and come to our city. What is there for us to do now?" The commander of Rāvana's army, Pragattan, who had seen Devendra's back, replied, "Even if we release Seeta, the Devas will ridicule us saying that our king did so out of fear of Rāma. *We cannot also think of ending our enmity by talking of peace, because, your brother, Vibheeshana will not agree to it.* While the armies of our enemies are approaching us, let us know what we should do now. Going to our enemies, fighting with the army of monkeys, killing Rāma and Lakshmana in war and returning is not possible now as our enemies have come here to fight us. What we desired has happened. Is this not better for us than the victory we were hoping to achieve? O king, for the thousand crore Rākshasās (of our army) to be destroyed, it will take one hundred yugas. No real damage will be done to our armies by the enemy. *Whereas the herd of monkeys in the enemy army will run away out of fear on seeing you, like dogs fleeing on sighting a mighty lion.* The enemies who have come to fight with us, will be made to retreat with their army and run helter-skelter. They will fall into the big sea and ultimately perish. You will see my unique prowess in a fierce battle. Please allow me to go to war."

Māliyavān who possessed good sense, dharma and Védic knowledge, thought that it was only proper for him to tell Rāvana the truth which would do universal good.

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He told Rāvana, "Those who speak of destiny being in their favour will be overtaken by ill fate and will be utterly ruined. Knowledgeable persons assert that Rāma is none other than the incarnation of God come here to wage war on us and Lakshmana is an incarnation of Ādisesha the serpent king. *It is also borne out by the scriptures, that the Lord, without departing from His exalted place, moves from His stable position and spreads Himself in different forms in different lives.* The knowledgeable ones also assert that the bows held by Rāma and Lakshmana were created by Brahma from very strong metals, that the accurately fitted strings of the bows look like Ādisesha, and that the sharp tips of the arrows, selected with the sole aim of extracting the lives of the enemies, have the capability of transcending even inexorable *time.* These knowledgeable ones say that Angada, the proud son of Vāli, and Neelan are the respective *alter egos* of Devendra and Agni. It is also said that Hanuman who came here as an envoy, is Vāyu's son, and that after this birth, he would be elevated to the position of Lord Brahma. Many assert that Rāma has come to this city to annihilate our clan and that the Devas have taken birth as vānaras. *These knowledgeable ones have warned that none should talk ill of Seeta who is unapproachable, as she is none other than Goddess Lakshmi who has come into the universe, along with the nectar of immortality, from the ocean of milk and is the mother of the whole world!* It is said that only at the instance of the Devas, did Rāma and Lakshmana go to the forest. Rāma, the embodiment of dharma, who is God Himself has taken birth as a human being to set at naught the might of the boons secured through penance by you. Thousands of bad omens have been seen in Lanka. Its deity has gone away because of the fierce attack of Hanuman who came in search of Seeta who is greater than a mother. Consequently, war has entered Lanka. Truthful and virtuous Vibheeshana more knowledgeable than Brihaspati (the preceptor of the Devas) has said, 'The Rākshasās along with their king, Rāvana, will be killed by the arrows of Rāma and Lakshmana'. I myself have known all these facts about our enemies. In ancient days, my clan of Rākshasās was destroyed by Tirumāl. My love for you, dear Rāvana, is boundless! *My grief and utter misery have prompted me to tell you what is going to happen. If you release Seeta, your troubles will come to an end."*

Asking Māliyavān to go away, Rāvana replied, "You have admitted that these men and monkeys are only Devas. Your knowledge is 'wonderful' indeed when you say that I will be defeated by them in war. Wherever the battle takes place, whether in this world or the nether world or beyond, if it is for taking Seeta back forcibly, will I ever retreat, even if I am confronted by a fierce war? *I possess, arrows which have*

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vanquished all the worlds and are capable of greater harm than even the sins of man! These arrows have pierced the backs of the fleeing Devas who had opposed me. Do you think they will not pierce the monkeys, too? Even if Lord Siva holding a trident in His long arm were to fight with me in the guise of a monkey, He would only experience defeat and run away. The pointed arrows that I possess are as deadly as the Hālāhala poison. Tirumāl who had once run away, fearing me, may come again, with renewed vigour, to fight, but my arrows will emit sparks of fire, reducing even the sun and the moon to ashes. *These indestructible arrows of mine are not like the jewel Kaustubham to be worn on the bosom of vānaras. If that victorious Devendra has to take birth as a monkey, then how can you conclude that my prowess has disappeared?* Are my mountain-like shoulders ineffective like a mountain broken into splinters by Devendra's Vajrāyudham?" *The night soon disappeared. The sun who used to move away afraid even to peep inside the golden walls of Lanka, acquired a new strength because the king of kings, Rāma, had come to Lanka to wage war against the Rākshasās. The sun rose brightly from the eastern horizon as though he wanted to see the ancient city of Lanka!*

9. SEEING LANKA

Prompted by his great love for Seeta, Rāma was keen on having a look at the golden city of Lanka where she was imprisoned. *Flanked by Sugreeva and Vibheeshana, and followed by Lakshmana and several experienced warriors, he climbed the Suvela mountain in the city of Lanka, like the king of lions surrounded by mighty, ferocious, victorious lions and tigers climbing a mountain. Rāma looked like a sun rising from the northern peak instead of an eastern one, portending the destruction of Lanka.* Holding a flawless bow capable of dispatching torrential arrows in a fierce and roaring battle, Rāma reached the mountain top. With his eyes, mighty hands, legs and face resembling lotuses, Rāma looked like a huge dark cloud with a forest of lotuses! Amidst mountain-like warriors, the sturdy-shouldered Rāma shone like an emerald mountain in the midst of golden mountains! Though Rāma was relieved of his anger after the completion of the Sétu, he was in great grief like the male nightingale separated from its mate. With his two lotus eyes, Rāma looked intently at the city of Lanka. There were poets who had composed rare poems praising great cities like Ayōdhya and comparing them to the city of Amarāvati, the capital of Devendra. These poets, owing to their ignorance, failed to compare them with the city of Lanka, which was many times more beautiful than Amarāvati. The palaces of Lanka were constructed with slabs of red gold studded with lustrous gems which put even the sun

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to shame. The plans of the buildings transcended the capability of even expert architects who wondered how sparkling gems were fixed in appropriate places! The lustre of these gems spread on all four sides with their shining light reaching the sky. *The whole scene looked as though the fire kindled by the valiant Hanuman as a mark of his victory over his enemies in the flag-ridden city of Lanka was still burning!*

Extolling the beauty of Lanka, Rāma told Lakshmana, "Lotus flowers have blossomed in that emerald-like pond full of clusters of clouds, silver-coloured swans and green leaves of creepers. Those palaces, close to one another, possess pillars embedded with ruby gems as bright as flames of fire which make even the dark clouds in the sky shine like red-hot iron rods! Look at those elephants, dark as darkness and with savage eyes, digging their diamond-like nails deep into the golden ground, carrying the golden dust in their trunks, showering their bodies with it, and walking like golden mountains on the move. Look at those flags waving in the breeze from those chowries (with golden handles) as if they are cleaning the 'dust' of clouds from the sky. Look at those golden buildings, all in a row, of great architectural beauty and embedded with the best of gems. With the unique palace of Rāvana in the centre, they look like a garland worn by the sea-lord.

"O knower of dharma! On both sides of those long and wide streets, there are rows of palaces, embedded with a variety of gems. The dazzling light emitted by them falls on the bodies of those horses running in the streets, making it impossible to find out their original complexion and breed. Those palaces constructed with fine crystal stones confusing even Manmatha, are visible only when the light of another object falls on them, but are invisible otherwise! The many objects contained in those marble palaces are seen like reflections on the surface of water. O holder of a shining bent bow with arrows, and possessor of crimson hands! Those emerald stones in the middle of that shamiana erected with white pearls looking like a cluster of rays from the cool white moon, resemble Lord Tirumāl seated on the ocean of milk. Inside a shining starry upper storey of that palace, a woman from Nāgaloka is removing a mirror from a long dark cover, like the cruel Rāhu releasing the moon after swallowing it. See those camels stretching their long necks towards the tall palaces flying flags, mistaking the series of bright lights emitted by the red rubies for new shoots of mango trees. Look at those peacock-like Rākshasis preparing the smoke of aquila for drying their hair adorned with flowers. Look at how Viswakarma, the great celestial architect, has created artificial hills made with blue gems, resembling heaps of sins accumulated over long periods by the Rākshasās who possess stony hearts unaccustomed to doing

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charity. *See those doe-eyed celestial women taken captive after being separated from their husbands. They are looking at us like a herd of peacocks eagerly appealing to the clouds during the rainy season.* Look at those denizens of the celestial world possessing sweet voices like the yāzh, wanting to see our army. The celestials appear to be exclaiming aloud that their future is safe. They look at the city of Lanka, as if they want to destroy it and run away." As Rāma described the beauty of Lanka, Lakshmana was utterly wonder-struck. In the mean time, Rāvana, the king of Lanka, climbed a golden tower, which touched the sky, to see the army of vānaras.

10. RĀVANA VIEWS THE VĀNARA ARMY

Looking like a furious elephant trying to break the branch of the tree to which it was tied, Rāvana, with his infatuation for Seeta and with his incomparable shoulders struck by Manmatha's arrows, stood like a mountain with several peaks. His shoulders which had become thin lusting for Seeta, now became stronger than the Meru, in readiness for war. The golden kalasams on the tower where Rāvana stood, looked like mountain-peaks, while the tower itself looked like the Meru. Rāvana on the tower looked like the serpent, Vāsuki, on the peaks of Meru, with its hoods raised! A huge umbrella, providing shade for the ten regions, was spread over Rāvana's head. The breeze from the chowries waved by the attendants, made the upper cloth on Rāvana's chest look like a water-fall cascading down a dark, tall glittering mountain. Honey-like Oorvasi, Tilottamai, Menaka and fourteen thousand celestial women with fruit-like lips, and bamboo-like arms, and well trained in music, hailing from the ocean of milk, stood on either side of Rāvana. The fierce sharp teeth in his mouth, looking like crescent moons in a cave, emitted bright light along with the lustre emanating from the jewels worn by him.

Rāvana with his garland of black lilies looked like a hill over which silent clouds had settled. While great scholars were pouring the meaning of rare literary works into his ears, his thoughts were constantly running after Seeta, wearing him out. A master of the veena, Sage Nārada was standing near him, making him take in the nectar of Sāma Véda. Rāvana was surrounded by innumerable cruel bodyguards holding sharp swords and bows. Another set of flawless celestials, capable of excavating the whole earth with their handsome hands, holding bows moved on either side of him. While he was surrounded by the attendants of the queen's apartment, terrestrial women with creeper-like waists danced and sang (the melodious Pancamam) along with the celestial damsels, making the Nāga women (with eyes more venomous than poison)

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feel shy! *Instead of the loud announcement that preceded his arrival, the fragrance of the sandalwood paste smeared over his shoulders heralded Rāvana's arrival.* Ten thousand crafty warriors with fiery eyes, willingly guarding the palaces holding sticks in their hands, never standing in the same place even for a moment, encircled Rāvana and protected him.

Rāvana, standing at the gateway of the tower like a watery cloud, looked straight at Rāma, the very essence and object sought by the Védas. On seeing him, Rāvana bit his lips. Sparks of fire flashed from his eyes. His angry snort echoed everywhere. His heart burned. When his left eyes and shoulders throbbed (a bad omen), Rāvana was upset and became furious. Speaking to his attendant Sāran, Rāvana said, "I can distinctly make out Rāma, by his complexion. Tell me who are all the other warriors by his side." Sāran replied, "That is Lakshmana, who, when told that Soorpanakha was the sister of the king of Lanka, became furious and severed her breasts, nose, and ears with his sword. *As the Cakravala mountain shields the black ocean, righteous Lakshmana guards Rāma, having chased away his sleep, which cannot be given up even by those who have reached heaven.* The one whom you see there, with his hands held by Lakshmana is Soorya's son Sugreeva, who fought fiercely with Vāli, making this universe tremble. He is the fiercest of all. Standing near him is Angada. His father Vāli was a mighty one who never needed any assistance from anyone. Vāli with his handsome arms had churned the ocean of milk, using the Mandara mountain and the serpent Vāsuki, to give the Devas the nectar of immortality. *The vānara who is walking yonder has gone up to the sun and is like Lord Tirumāl. He is none other than Hanuman, whose actions you have seen."*

Pointing to Neelan, Sāran continued, "The one who stands there, is the son of Agni. Though he does not possess the powerful spear and the fatal cord of Yama, Neelan, is considered equal to Lord Siva and Yama in destroying the world! The solitary one standing there, mighty as a mountain, is Nalan. Even before the fire of Rāma's anger on Varuna was put out, Nalan constructed a Sétu across the wide sea! The one who stands there knows the past, the present and the future. He has been there since the days of the churning of the ocean of milk. He is Jāmbavan, the king of the bears. Though he is very old, having lived for a long time, he can excavate the seven worlds! By the side of Neelan, very near the black mountain, you can see the two sons of Aswin, the celestial physician. Resembling golden rocks, these two are like Rāma and

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Lakshmana in their strength. That vānara seen in the centre is Kumudan. Those who stand next to him are Kumudākkan, Gavayan and Gavayākkan. The other one there is Kesari, a warrior of rare attainments and the father of the envoy hailed as Lord Siva and Lord Brahma, namely Hanuman. Then there is Muraban with bright shoulders and fierce lustrous teeth. His strong nails resemble those of mighty Lord Narasimhamurti. Next to him is Sarabhan capable of uprooting huge mountains at will. The other elderly vānara is Satavali. The one who looks like Lord Siva, though not possessing three eyes, is Panasan. That is Edaban who thinks he is an important vānara for the ensuing war. The great scholar who stands opposite him is Sudenan. The warrior who stands like a bull to the left of Sugreeva and who is capable of uprooting hills, is the ferocious Dadimukhan! The other one over there, looking like a lion, is *Sangan*. O great one, listen to me. *The warriors in this vānara army cannot be counted. It may be possible to count the stars in the sky, the fishes in the sea, or the particles of sand on the sea-shores; but the number of vānaras in the army is countless." Listening to the words of Sāran, the angry Rāvana smiled. He told Sāran, "You are praising the small-headed monkeys roaming in the groves. The herd of deer moving in the forests and mountains, may be many. Even so what harm can they do to a lion?"*

11. TOPPLING THE CROWNS

As Rāvana was talking to Sāran, Rāma told Vibheeshana, "Please tell me the names and the respective capabilities of the Rākshasās (who have come to gauge our strength) standing in the sky after emerging from Lanka protected by indestructible walls. Vibheeshana replied, "Over the tower of the hillock in the city of Lanka, the Rākshasa who is in the midst of dancers of the celestial world including Tilottamai is Rāvana who has planted the seedlings — his relatives — in the field known as hell." *Even before Vibheeshana could proceed further, Sugreeva, with sparks of fire coming from his eyes, flew into the sky and pounced upon Rāvana in the same manner in which Hanuman had once pounced on the sun mistaking him for a red ripe fruit. Leaving the peak of the lofty Suvela mountain, which touched the starry sky, and leaping onto the tower where Rāvana was standing, Sugreeva resembled his father, the sun, rising from the eastern mountain and going over to the western hill.* Leaping towards the tower to attack Rāvana, Sugreeva appeared like Jatāyu who had jumped on Rāvana to wipe Seeta's flood of tears. The celestial dancers, who had been happy

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that they possessed large eyes, to see Rāma the cloud-like ocean of grace, ran helter-skelter like a herd of peacocks leaving a mountain struck by thunder. *Sugreeva, the son of the thousand-rayed sun, faced Rāvana and stood like Mount Kailas standing before the blue mountain. The fearless Rāvana stood like Lord Siva confronting the deadly Hālāhala poison. Asked by Rāvana why he had come there, Sugreeva, without caring to reply, punched Rāvana's chest with such force as to leave the impress of both his fists on it.* With his eyes flashing fire, Rāvana glared at Sugreeva. Raising his twenty long hands and looking like a forest full of trees, he hit Sugreeva with a thunderous sound that echoed in all the eight regions. Blood flowed from Sugreeva's body! With great fury, he pressed his body firmly over that of Rāvana, rose up quickly, and kicked the latter's ten faces and crowned heads. The next moment, mighty Rāvana grabbed Sugreeva's legs and made him suffer severely from unbearable pain.

Like a lion crushing a rutting elephant, Rāvana threw Sugreeva on the ground and trampled on him, making him unconscious. Sugreeva quickly recovered and stood up. He dashed Rāvana to the ground, breaking his crescent teeth which gave out sparks. Scooping the blood oozing from the cavernous mouth of Rāvana, Sugreeva drank it. The dark-complexioned Rāvana caught hold of Sugreeva, adroitly swung him round, and dashed him against a mountain. Sugreeva who was as ferocious as Lord Siva, punched Rāvana's chest, pressed his hips hard and threw him into a moat. Coming out of it, Rāvana in turn threw Sugreeva into the same ditch and challenged him to come out. The undaunted Sugreeva came out and embraced Rāvana hard. Both of them fell and rolled on the ground, neither of them losing his grip on the other. In that act, they both fell into the moat again. Rolling together left and right with great rage, plunging inside the water for a while, and coming out of it later, they dashed against each other and got separated. Suspending the fight for some time, they resumed it. *While they fought seriously, they had no serious thought as to what to do next. Sugreeva treated the moat as the ocean of milk. The merciless Rāvana resembling the Mandara mountain was the churning staff, moving in the moat like a machine operated by the handsome hands of Sugreeva who resembled his brother, Vāli, who had once churned the ocean of milk.* The blood oozing from the wounds of both flowed like a river. Rāvana and Sugreeva soared into the sky and fought like two hawks for such a long time that the people of the world ran helter-skelter fearing that the two might fall on them any time. In the far sky, Sugreeva the son of Soorya, held the many arms of the furious cloud-like black-complexioned Rāvana in a tight embrace and looked like the sun with the halo.

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After some time, in their fierce encounter in the sky, Rāvana with his mighty shoulders, overshadowed Sugreeva and looked like a cloud shutting out the sun. Women wearing anklets screamed. The big city of Lanka was destabilised. When ferocious Sugreeva resembling Lord Narasimhamurti jumped, the tower of Lanka crumbled. Rāvana declared that he would eat Sugreeva, went after him with great fury and caught hold of his hands tightly, like a cloud (with lightning as its teeth) closely following thunder and catching it! *Sugreeva who was standing, fought violently with Rāvana, exhibiting great strength, and rubbed him against the ground making even Yama shiver out of fear.* Like a powerful machine, Rāvana in turn threw away Sugreeva, who bounced back like a ball to attack Rāvana. Continuing their fight, they descended to the earth and fought in several places. Both were furious like the all-pervading fire. The walls cracked, tall mountain peaks collapsed, and the fort-walls of Lanka crumbled. The Rākshasās of Lanka could neither visualise the condition of the bodies of Rāvana and Sugreeva moving in the air, nor could they find out when these two were engaged in the fight and when they were not! *Even those Rākshasās who were physically present at the site of the fight became dejected, unable to say for certain who threw whom, or who advanced towards whom.*

When the fight was going on and Sugreeva did not return, Rāma became anxious. With Sugreeva's disappearance, Rāma feared that all his plans had come to an end. He became sad at Sugreeva's folly which had ruined him as well as the Devas, giving victory to the Rākshasās. Feeling that without Sugreeva no further action was possible, Rāma wailed aloud, "O dear friend who gave life to this humble soul! You have played into the hands of the cruel Rāvana full of witchcraft and possessing divine weapons. How can you come back, escaping their surveillance? Will life be worthwhile without you, even if I secure the seven worlds? I planned something, but something else has happened. Will I live any longer? I am afraid to hear that you are dead. *If you are killed by the evil Rāvana, will you not be blamed for slaying me in the war?* O Sugreeva, even if you are dead, I can survive and completely destroy the Rākshasa clan and then give up my life. But then, I shall not do such a thing because I will be blamed by the people of the world, that I forgot my close friend who protected me at a crucial time. Your abundant love for me has made you do this deed at your peril. You helped me when I was in a pitiable state. Without you, I will not live. Even if every one of the seventy vellam warriors in our army is safely back in our prosperous city, will this grief of losing you ever end?"

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In the fierce fight between Rāvana and Sugreeva, neither of them won or lost. *Suddenly, making Rāvana feel ashamed and wish he were dead, Sugreeva grabbed the precious gems from his crowns and returned with them.* Placing the gems at the feet of Rāma who was weeping for sorrow, Sugreeva paid obeisance to him and shyly stood by his side. Rāma, Lakshmana and the seventy vellam vānaras felt as if they had all got back their lives. Rāma embraced his beloved Sugreeva, bathed him with tears and healed the gaping, bleeding wounds inflicted on him by Rāvana. Addressing Sugreeva, Rāma said, "Separation from you broke my heart. My life was oscillating and my body became inactive. Has not your discerning mind suffered any damage?" With flowing tears Rāma continued, "O possessor of shoulders mightier than a rock, if the merciless Rāvana had committed the crime of killing you, I would have destroyed him with a shower of fierce arrows and achieved victory. *Yet, without you, would I not have been defeated, even if I were alive? If we think seriously, can we not realise that pride, prowess and manliness are meant only to add strength to the quality of patience? You failed to realise your greatness. You risked your future as well as your present life.* What did you think and what did you do? If the stalemate had continued and you had delayed your arrival, I would have concluded that definite harm had befallen you. Of what use would Seeta or this world be to me then? I would have followed you in death, and this world would have followed me in death. Why did you indulge in these pranks?"

Sugreeva replied, "I do not possess the prowess of Jatāyu and so I could not emulate his unique act; neither did I attempt anything good as was done by Guhan. Though I have heard of their deeds, I have done nothing to retrieve the sweet-voiced Seeta from her prison. I have returned empty-handed without bringing back the ten heads of Rāvana. Our strong enemies are still alive. Acting on my monkey instincts, when I saw the enemy leader, I leapt on him, fought with him and returned, only spoiling your fame. Even though you destroyed my enemy and gave me life and my kingdom, I have not destroyed your enemy. *I have left that task for you.* Carrying the burden of my life, I simply stand in front of you. The shoulders of this humble monkey have been proved inferior to the tusks of the furious elephants guarding the eight regions. I had vowed that I would destroy your enemies even before you dispatched your arrows; but I and my depressed mind have returned, without doing any damage. *Your envoy, scholarly Hanuman, exhibited the might of his tail to those who displayed the strength of their spears and bows in the fierce battle in Lanka; whereas, I have exhibited only the might of my legs by taking to my heels. What price the prowess of my hands now?"* Sugreeva

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derided himself thus, after paying obeisance to Rāma. Vibheeshana with his glittering ornaments, looked at Rāma and then addressed Sugreeva, "The exquisite gems brought by you are from the crowns that adorned Rāvana's heads. By bringing these gems which are more precious than his life, you have uprooted the name and fame of Rāvana who is capable of plucking the precious gems from the crown of the serpent king, Ādisesha, even with his legs. Your prowess in ably plucking the precious gems from the ten crowns of Rāvana is great, indeed! Even Lord Siva could not have achieved this. *O possessor of mighty arms which plucked the precious gems! Your feat of snatching the gems from the ten crowns of Rāvana, is far greater than plucking the white crescent moon adorning Lord Siva, or plucking the divine gem from the bosom of Tirumāl. O king of vānaras, you have actually brought the gems for laying the foundation of Rāvana's tomb."*

Rāma was immensely happy at Sugreeva's great love for him, and said, "This unique act of Sugreeva is neither mean, nor to be condemned. It is a display of gratitude; a quality to be cherished by heroes. None except Varāhamurti (an incarnation of Lord Tirumāl who carried the earth) could have accomplished this task so fast! Sugreeva's victorious act this day, is laudable." *The sun saw the precious gems brought by his son Sugreeva, from the crowns of victorious Rāvana, shining like lightning. Sensing that something untoward might happen, he moved away and disappeared beyond the western mountain and went into 'hiding' as if afraid of Rāvana.* After the night set in, the gems plucked from the crowns of Rāvana removed darkness with their lustre, like the light coming from a lamp. With robust shoulders, and with his mind full of Sugreeva's victorious act, Rāma descended from the Suvela mountain and returned to his place. Rāvana, the king of Lanka, who had never till then faced a predicament like the one he had faced that day, was ashamed that the Devas had seen the humiliation he had suffered at the hands of Sugreeva. Even the looks of women, like the looks of men, did not arouse the emotion of love in him. Though alive, he was like one dead. *Like the descent of his fame, Rāvana descended from the tower!*

12. BATTLE LINES DRAWN

Having lost his prestige, Rāvana, with his faces hanging like drooping lotuses, entered his sky-high palace. Denying himself drinks or devotional songs, he rested on his bed silently without even going to the dance-hall. *He resembled the sharp-toothed multiheaded serpent-king, Ādisesha, hissing and sighing with the loss of its precious gem 'Nāgaratnam' and resting with its mouths wide open on the ocean of milk after*

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being separated from Lord Tirumāl. In the mean time, a sturdy deceptive spy known as Sārdoolan, who cannot be identified even by one closer than his own mother, reached the gates of the palace to convey to Rāvana what he had observed. On being ushered in, Sārdoolan paid obeisance to Rāvana who commanded the spy to narrate all that he had seen in the enemy camp. Looking at the faces of Rāvana who resembled a lion inside its den, the spy understood Rāvana's agony and said, "O hero, Hanuman has laid siege to the fortress at the western gate with seventeen vellam vānaras. Rāma has asked Sugreeva to be with him with another seventeen vellam army. Prince Angada is to lead his seventeen vellam battalion at the southern gateway, while Neelan is to lead the army with a similar strength at the eastern gate. Two vellam vānaras have been delegated by Rāma to collect all the fruits and vegetables in the world to provide food for the army. *Vibheeshana is to watch all the gateways and convey the position to Rāma and Lakshmana who are now standing at the northern gate."* On hearing the words of Sārdoolan, Rāvana's cruel eyes became furious. He ground his teeth and said that the very next day he would wash away the dust arising from the battle with the blood oozing from the bodies of his enemies.

Like the morning sunlight flashing over a magnificent blue mountain, Rāvana with blood-red shoulders reached a crystal hall (which looked deceptively empty) for consultations. He put ten crore fiends on duty to keep vigil. Thinking of the future course of action, he sent his servants to bring his ministers, all of whom hailed from noble families. After their arrival, Rāvana looked at those ministers who had boundless knowledge and said, "Armies of monkeys have surrounded all the gateways. We are not going to be spared a war. There is no point in worrying about it any longer. What shall we do next?" *Nikumban replied, "You seem to be concerned that seventy vellam monkeys have surrounded the fortress of Lanka and you ask us about the future course of action! But we have with us, inside the city of Lanka, a thousand vellam army which can wipe out the enemy.* When our Rākshasās had waged war with weapons like curved clubs, battle-axes, spears and swords, the Devas ran away leaving behind their weapons. How funny it is to think that unarmed monkeys can achieve victory over us! The only way open for us is to take up our weapons and go forthwith to war." His eyes flashing fire, Nikumban laughed haughtily and beat the ground violently with his hands. *The good old Māliyavān, however, said, "Lust that can cause us misery has completely destroyed us. Was Hanuman (who burnt and reduced Lanka to ashes) in possession of a Disc in his hand? Did Sugreeva (who snatched the precious gems from Rāvana's ten crowns) possess a Trident, a Spear, or*

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a Sword? Before the arrows of Rāma are directed at us, let us return Seeta and surrender, with all our weapons, to our enemies though they are weaponless. Can there be a better step than this for us?" Looking furiously at Māliyavān, Rāvana said, "You have forgotten my victories and the fame I have earned through my heroic acts. Do not hurl unworthy insults at me just because you have no love for me." Thereafter Māliyavān stopped talking.

Addressing the commander of his army, Rāvana said, "Along with your numerous relatives, guard the eastern region of Lanka with two hundred vellam select warriors. O Mahōdaran, you are such a great killer that you had deprived even Yama of his pleasure! Proceed to the southern gate immediately along with the battle-crazy Māpakkan and two hundred vellam warriors and kill all the monkeys. O Indrajit, what purpose will be served by talking about your prowess? You have seen for yourself the atrocities committed by Hanuman. Take your own army and another two hundred vellam warriors before dawn to the western gate. O Virupākkan, all these days, you have been inflicting untold sufferings on the Devas. I know it is beneath your dignity to fight with these despicable monkeys. With your core army and your ministers, protect this ancient city of Lanka. As for me, I will guard the northern gateway with two hundred vellam warriors along with rutting elephants, horses, infantry and chariots which have all been unhappy without a chance to fight."

With the disappearance of the troublesome night and the emergence of dawn, the Devas, Védic sages, Seeta the beautiful, Rāma the great warrior and Rāvana the king of Lanka became happy. The sun who was sad that he could not come inside the kingdom of Lanka all these days (for fear of cruel Rāvana), rose as though he came out of hiding, because that day he saw an emperor in Rāma who could protect him and subdue the arrogance of Rāvana. After the onset of daylight, a great deal of dust filled all the regions and the roaring of the waves of the sea subsided. The armies of monkeys stood at their respective posts, surrounded the fortress of Lanka, and raised a roar that went above ancient Lanka's lofty walls, tore the sky and shattered the stars. With the prayers offered by Devendra, Rāma got up and moved, with Lakshmana and Sugreeva walking ahead. Wicked Rāvana's city was 'devoured' by a sea of Rākshasās, whose might was beyond the reckoning of even those who had mastered a sea of books! *Engulfed by a sea of vānaras, the city of Lanka appeared to be in the midst of the ocean of milk. Rāvana's vast army was encircled by the army of monkeys, as if it was caught in a net.* The sight was like the seven seas rising due to the pralaya hurricane and making all the worlds disappear en masse.

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13. ANGADA AS ENVOY

The charitable Rāma, with an army of seventy vellam vānaras, laid siege to the city of Lanka. He waited at the northern gate for the arrival of Rāvana, the thief who had stealthily abducted Seeta. *As Rāvana was not sighted, compassionate Rāma told Vibheeshana, "I have decided to send an envoy to Rāvana to tell him that if he releases Seeta now, his life will be spared. If he still refuses to do so, it will be our duty to slay him. This I feel is proper and just."* Vibheeshana hailed Rāma's suggestion. Sugreeva lauded the idea as befitting a king. Lakshmana, however, said, "To show mercy to that ruthless Rāvana is wrong. He imprisoned Seeta the very personification of effulgence, did great harm to the Devas, made the sages suffer, usurped the wealth of Devendra, and pursued a sinful path. O eternal Lord, when you went after the deceptive deer, Rāvana caused boundless agony to you by separating your wife from you. He killed your father Jatāyu, who, out of compassion for Seeta, fought with him. If you are to show mercy and spare Rāvana's life even after he has committed all these sins, what will be the fate of your promise to Vibheeshana (who surrendered to you) that he would be the king of Lanka as long as your name lasted in this world? What will happen to your vow to protect the sages who came to you and proclaimed you as their king? *Probably because of your ascetic life based on dharma and penance, you have forgotten all this.* Or else, you must have mercifully felt, after seeing Lanka's prosperity, that it was bad to destroy it. War alone is the right course."

Rāma smiled and said, *"I have forgotten nothing. The final outcome will only be war. Can we discard the dharma enunciated by scholars? Though we are mighty in the art of warfare, the only way to achieve victory is to do everything patiently and properly. If Hanuman is sent again as an envoy, it will give an impression to our enemies that we have none other than Hanuman who has the strength to reach Lanka. Besides Hanuman, only Angada can return safely facing the heroic attacks of the Rākshasās."* After the acceptance of his suggestion by all, Rāma told Angada, "Convey two alternatives to our enemies. Come back and let me know their choice." *Masculine Angada who enjoyed the grace of Rāma, felt elated. His decorated golden shoulders became bigger than mountains. The state of his happy mind was beyond description.* Aṅgada wanted to know the two alternatives to be conveyed. Rāma said, "Tell Rāvana this. 'Do you want to save your life by releasing Seeta, or do you want your ten heads cut into several pieces by Rāma's arrows? Tell us boldly. It is neither in keeping with

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dharma nor does it befit brave ones to hide and live safely inside their city. It is neither a manly act nor does it conform to Védic rules. If you have the prowess to stand before Rāma and shoot arrows at him, come out and fight." *Angada became so happy that he said to himself, "If it was not to be Hanuman, it was me that Rāma chose as his envoy. Henceforth who can be compared to me?"* After prostrating himself at the feet of Rāma, Angada proceeded majestically like a lion flying in the sky, as fast as the arrow shot from Rāma's fierce bow. Angada (the envoy) had never disobeyed the words of great Rāma an incarnation of Lord Tirumāl. Crossing the Meru-like for wall, Angada reached Lanka and entered the abode of Rāvana. On seeing Angada, the Rākshasās were scared. They thought that Hanuman had come again to kill them They shed tears. *Their prayer to Rāvana for protecting them from hardship, and the words of advice from his own officers, were heard by the twenty ears of Rāvana's ten heads!*

Looking at Rāvana, Angada felt, "We were able to find stones and trees that could fill the sea and construct a Sétu. An answer was also found to cross the small sea. But is there a Yama to be found to take away the life of this Rāvana? With the shining weapons in his hands, can he be opposed by anyone? If at all there is to be a fitting reply to Rāvana's prowess, it can only be the bow in Rāma's hand. When I observe Rāvana deeply, my consolation is that Rāma has come to kill him. Except Rāma who killed my father, Vāli, who in turn had defeated Rāvana, there is no one capable of destroying Rāvana and curing him of his malady of lust for divine Seeta. My father Sugreeva is mightier than all, because he could engage himself in a fist fight with Rāvana and snatch the precious gems from his crowns, like the celestial eagle snatching away the wide-mouthed snakes in this world." *Angada now stood before the leonine Rāvana, a combination of wild fire, poison and Yama, with hands, legs and lustre-shedding crowned heads.* Emitting sparks of fire from his eyes, Rāvana saw Angada and asked him, "Who are you? Why have you come here? Reply before my servants kill and eat you." Angada, the son of mighty Vāli, laughed heartily showing his sharp teeth. He told Rāvana, "I am the envoy sent by Rāma who is the Lord of the five elements and also the world surrounded by water. He is the consort of Seeta, an incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi dwelling in the lotus. He is the Supreme Lord of all deities. He is the essence of the scriptures which you recite and the creator of destiny. I have come here to convey to you the commands of that Lord." Rāvana laughed and said, "Instead of bringing with him the Trinity of Gods, your Rāma has collected monkeys and built a Sétu across a pond-like sea. He has perhaps sent you to find o

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if I will show mercy at least now. How can he be the Lord of the world? Even Lord Siva with Ganga and the crescent moon in His tuft and an additional eye on His forehead, and Lord Tirumāl with the Disc and the Conch in His hands, dare not enter this city. Who are you to have come here without any fear, as an envoy, to convey a message to me, for the sake of a mere man?" Angada replied, "I am the son of Vāli who had churned the ocean of milk with the Mandara mountain and who once tied someone known as Rāvana to his tail, and moved about on the mountains full of elephants." Rāvana replied, "Was not your father my friend? There is also evidence for that. Can there be a greater blemish for you than becoming the envoy of an ordinary man? Here and now, I am making you the lord of the vānaras. My son, it is good you came here without delaying." Rāvana who was soon to see the end of his life, continued, "By leaving Rāma, you will be putting an end to the criticism of being called a fool, paying obeisance to him who killed your father. I will then have Seeta for me, and you as my son. What is better than this? There is no doubt that those two men will die today or tomorrow. I am giving you your kingdom which you may rule sitting on a golden throne till pralaya, making the Devas pay their respects to you. I myself will crown you king."

Angada clapped his hands and laughed aloud shaking his strong shoulders and chest and also the city of Lanka. He told Rāvana, "Knowing that all the inhabitants of Lanka will soon die, your brother Vibheeshana left you and came to us. *If you think that by spouting words, you can win me, it will not happen. Having come as an envoy, I will not accept the kingdom offered by you. It is like a lion accepting the leadership of animals, from a cur!"* Rāvana rose angrily, shouting that he would kill Angada. Then he felt that with a weapon in his hands, it would be beneath his dignity to kill a monkey. He told Angada, "If, trusting Rāma and Lakshmana (whose days are numbered), you have come here as their envoy, taking courage to die, tell me why you have come." Angada replied, "Compassionate Rāma has commanded me, 'Go and tell that sinful Rāvana who wants to destroy his entire Rākshasa race — hiding inside his fortress, afraid of war — to release Seeta forthwith, or else lose his life by opposing me in battle. Tell Rāvana that he did not have the courage to come before me when his grandmother, Tātakai, was killed and her body was thrown to the vultures, nor when his uncle, Subāhu, was destroyed along with his army, nor when Soorpanakha's breasts and nose were severed. Is he capable of any heroic deeds now? I had completely eliminated Khara, his brothers, relatives, and his entire army. Knowing all this, despicable Rāvana, through a mean trick, separated me from my younger brother,

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Lakshmana, and stole my Seeta. Will this Rāvana have the courage to face a fierce battle? Hanuman, my envoy, crossed the sea, destroyed all those who opposed him, ground Rāvana's son Akshakumāran into a paste on the ground, burnt the city of Lanka and returned after crossing the sea in the presence of Rāvana. Will he who did not go after Hanuman, offer fight now? Will this Rāvana, who neither pulled up the spies who went back and extolled me, nor opposed Varuna who worshipped me and allowed me to construct a Sétu across the sea, nor came out of hiding when I gave Vibheeshana the kingdom of Lanka, have the courage to come before me? *Tell him that yesterday in the presence of the Devas and the lotus-faced women, tiger-like Sugreeva snatched the jewels from his crowns. Yet, Rāvana did not follow Sugreeva to kill him. Will such a Rāvana enter the battlefield?'* Rāma has commanded me to convey all this to you and return.

"Consider one of the two options offered to you. If you prefer not to endanger your life, return Seeta to Rāma, pay obeisance to him and secure for yourself a pleasant life. If however, you decide to end your life along with your kith and kin, then come out of the gateway of your palace. *You had fought fiercely in several wars, killing all beings that arose in the worlds created by water, fire, air and land. If you now hide in your city, you will only suffer humiliation."* Listening to Angada's words, Rāvana became furious. It appeared as if he would swallow all beings. He commanded his four attendants to catch Angada and hurl him to the ground. Angada caught hold of the four Rākshasās who tried to attack him, leapt high and severed their heads. Shouting loudly, he trampled them with his legs. He told the warriors assembled there, "Before Rāma's scorching arrows as bright as lightning are dispatched, you might as well move to places of safety." Smeared with sandalwood paste mixed with flowing blood, Angada rose into the sky, raising a loud uproar. Again, descending from the sky as though the moon was coming down, Angada reached Rāma and fell at his feet. Rāma asked Angada to tell him what Rāvana thought. Angada replied, "What purpose will be served in detailing Rāvana's views? The passion of that obstinate fool will not end till his crowned heads are severed. We have to wage war; there is no scope for peace."

14. THE FIRST DAY'S FIGHT

The announcement that war had begun, was declared by the beating of drums. Rāma asked the warriors to stand in rows and divisions before all the gateways of Lanka. Directing them, Rāma said, "Bring rocks and trees from every place with you

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hands which are well experienced in filling up the sea. Let them be thrice as big as the ones you had brought for putting up the Sétu. Fill the moat surrounding the fortress of well-guarded Lanka with them. Block all the routes with big trees to prevent the movement of the Rākshasās. Challenge them to a fight. Occupy forthwith the top of the fort-walls where flags were hitherto hoisted and where even the sun was afraid to enter." The armies of leonine monkeys brought huge rocks with big trees and filled the sea-like moat surrounding Lanka. Water flowed out of the moat scaring away the crocodiles and other creatures living there. The seventy vellam monkeys looking like the eighth sea, filled the moat with trees and rocks. The water from the moat entered the gateways of Lanka and encircled the city as though extending a helping hand to Rāma. *The monkeys plucked all the lotus flowers, along with their stems, and threw them away, as if the fame of Rāvana was being cast away along with its very roots. The long black lilies bent with nectar seemed to indicate that the moat around Lanka was weeping because the glory of Rāvana's might would be lost that day.* Humming bees deserted the flowers. Flocks of swans flew away holding their eggs in their mouths. The monkeys leapt, forcing the pollen from the arecanut trees to fall into the water tanks. Consequently, the fish in these tanks jumped and drove away the swans resting on the lotuses. The gigantic trees and innumerable mountains thrown into it, pressed the moat so hard that the water in it rose and flowed as rivers joining the sea. *Dipping into this water and rising again, the nectar-shedding lotuses looked like the faces of women dipping into water and coming out.*

The vānaras filled even the ancient big moat surrounding Rāvana's palace, proving that while there was no limit to one's greatness there was also no limit to one's downfall. The army of vānaras (who filled the moat with huge rocks) snatched big trees and smashed the Rākshasa army guarding it, raising a thunderous sound which frightened even the sea and the clouds. Getting on top of the Meru-like fort-walls that touched the sky, the vānaras looked like innumerable swollen white flags! Unable to sustain the weight, the fort-walls sank into the earth. There was the beating of big drums in the enemy camp. On hearing this, the four types of armed forces rose up. The flags held on the backs of elephants screened the sky. The dust raised by the marching armies brought the eight regions closer. The sound of bugles, the jingling bells of the garlands worn by horses, the sound of bells fitted on the chariots, and the roar of rutting elephants happy at the impending war, could be heard all over the place. *The vānara and Rākshasa forces clashed with each other at the appointed time fixed by relentless fate, with good omens for the Devas but bad omens for the Rākshasās*

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indicating their annihilation. A sea of vānaras went to war with their teeth, big trees and stones, while a sea of Rākshasās entered the war with bows, long spears and other lustrous weapons. The arrows shot by the Rākshasās, reduced the stones thrown by the vānaras, to powder. The Rākshasa arrows were in turn cut into bits, by the huge trees thrown at them by the vānaras. Innumerable spears smeared with red blood pierced the big trees and destroyed them. The army of vānaras with mighty hands, threw weighty stones on the Rākshasās and broke their heads. Their damaged brains came out of their mouths, ears and noses. The swift arrows from the bows of Rākshasās (darker than darkness) pierced the vānaras. Blood flowed from their wounds. With stones in their hands, they rolled down.

The vānara warriors standing on the top of the fort-walls, hurled stones which fell like thunder and took away the lives of the wicked Rākshasās. Fierce Rākshasās threw leaf-shaped spears at the vānaras, resulting in their falling down from the fort-walls and losing their lives in the sand below. On seeing this, several vānaras ground their teeth in utter wrath, punched the Rākshasās, caught hold of their necks and sliced them with their sharp nails. Attacking them with their hands and kicking them with their legs, the vānaras killed many Rākshasās. In turn, cruel-eyed Rākshasās pierced the bodies of the vānaras with javelins and spears, shot arrows at them, and attacked them with iron clubs, and reduced their number. The fort-walls of Lanka made of red gold and smeared with copper-coloured blood, now resembled coral mountains. The flow of blood carried mountains of dead bodies into the salty sea. Varieties of birds shrieking aloud, swarmed the sky as if a canopy was laid above Lanka which had defied even Devendra. Dark headless trunks danced hither and thither with raised hands, beneath the crimson sky. *Drops of blood from the wings of birds (which had plunged earlier into the frightening blood) fell on different coloured flags on which they rested and made them all appear red.* The strength of the monkeys ebbed with the blood shed by them which flowed down the tall walls of the fort and rolled like a big sea. Large armies of Rākshasās filled the walls of the fort, the elevated platforms and gateways of the fort and every other place. Owing to their mounting pressure, several vānaras swam across the sea of blood. When the sea of vānaras began losing their strength, the sea of Rākshasās with deadly weapons, roared for joy like the pralaya sea. *The collective sound of the beat of drums, the blare of conches and trumpets, and the twang of bows, caused hardship even to the sea. Just as all worlds came out of the four faces of Lord Brahma, the huge Rākshasa army came out of the four tall gateways of Lanka.* A long row of mighty elephants marched out of the gateways (with flags

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hoisted on them), like marching mountains. Golden chariots moved fast in the mire caused by the flood of saliva from rutting elephants and converted even the firm ground into a slushy one. The wall of the fort (which was like a cloth around the damsel known as Lanka) was pounded by the strong vānaras' shoulders. The horses that came out looked like the waves of the huge sea! The dust raised by the marching army encircled even the celestial region.

Destabilising the vānaras, the Rākshasa army forged ahead and assembled before a defiant Sugreeva. On seeing the depleted strength of the vānara army and also the increased might of the proud angry advancing army of Rākshasās, Sugreeva became furious and his eyes sparked fire. Grabbing a huge white tree, he went into the midst of the battalions of elephants, horses, chariots and infantry. *Moving with tremendous speed, giving an illusion of several Sugreevas fighting against each one of the Rākshasās, Sugreeva resembled Hanuman who had earlier fought with a festoon pole.* Sugreeva swung the big white tree, breaking the legs of elephants, horses, and the warriors of the infantry. Gem-set chariots rolled down and hot blood flowed like a river. Under Sugreeva's leadership, the vānara army furiously clashed with the Rākshasa army. Hit by the stones thrown by the monkeys in the battlefield, several Rākshasās lost their lives. Similarly, many vānaras died with their bodies severed by the fiery enemy arrows. During the fierce battle, the vānaras full of valour, threw stones and fought gallantly. The bodies of arrogant Rākshasās, filled the entire southern region. Crowds of fiends sang and rejoiced. Headless trunks danced. The blood flowing from the dead Rākshasās rushed into the sea, and chaste Rākshasis came in search of the bodies of their husbands killed in the battlefield. Blood from the elephants felled by the vānaras flowed like a river into the sea. The continuous rain of arrows shot by the Rākshasās killed countless vānaras and caused a great flow of blood. With the crushing of the army of elephants by the monkeys, the might of the Rākshasās was destroyed. The battlefield looked chaotic. Vajramushti came fast in his chariot, followed by eagles, as if a boat was moving in the sea. Making way for himself, he clashed with the vānaras. Showering sharp arrows on them, he destroyed many vānaras and opposed Sugreeva. The Devas became concerned about Sugreeva's fate. A furious Sugreeva looked at Vajramushti and at once jumped on his swift chariot drawn by mighty horses. After destroying Vajramushti's bow and quiver and smashing his body, Sugreeva got up. *Vajramushti fell down like a mountain and died. The Rākshasās who were with him trembled at the sight and returned to the city of Lanka, while the army of vānaras roared in jubilation like the waves of the sea.*

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At the eastern gate, the venomous Rākshasās boiling with rage hurled clubs, swords, spears and shot powerful arrows which wounded the vānaras. Bleeding profusely, they ran away from fear. *Neelan the son of Agni, uprooted a big tree and threw it with great force at the Rākshasās. Like the pralaya fire, the impact of the tree shattered them, caused the demolition of the chariots and charioteers, destroyed the horses drawing them and killed huge dark elephants and all the yālis.* The blood flowing from their bodies filled the sea. The running away of the frightened Rākshasa army was watched by the cruel commander Kumbānu. He attacked the vānaras with long-range arrows and broke their army into segments. Seeing this, the leader of the bears, Idumban, who inspired awe in all the eight directions, took a massive rock, jumped like a tornado, faced Kumbānu, and threw the rock at him before he could shoot arrows from his bow. Kumbānu's bow as well as his chariot with the flag-mast were broken and the horses were killed. Kumbānu who had once made even the Devas retreat from a fight, became furious. Like a thunderbolt falling from the clouds and tearing the earth, he leapt towards Idumban and hit him hard on his chest. *Idumban retaliated. He held Kumbānu's head, and dashed it against his own. Kumbānu's head split, resulting in his death.* Watching this, Pragattan (Sumāli's son) bent his bow, twanged it loudly and showered lustrous arrows. Attacked by hundreds and thousands of arrows, the frightened vānara army ran helter-skelter. Neelan became furious on seeing this. Taking a huge rock, deadly Neelan threw it at the army of Rākshasās. Pragattan showered fierce arrows and broke the rock into a hundred pieces. Neelan then uprooted a big tree, threw it with a thunderous roar and reduced Pragattan's flag and his horse-drawn chariot to powder.

Pragattan stepped onto the ground with great rage. Losing his chariot and his bow, he ran like empty thunder without the cloud, and the sun without the halo. His eyes flashing fire, Pragattan holding a club bit his lips and approached Neelan. At once, with utter fury, Neelan lifted Pragattan along with his club and threw him into the sky. Pragattan dropped down to the earth and attacked Neelan with the club, causing him to bleed profusely to the chagrin of the celestials. Immediately, Neelan snatched Pragattan's club, threw it away and gave him a mighty blow. Without losing courage, Pragattan, who was spitting blood, hit the mountainous chest of Neelan even before the latter could attack him. The intensity of the fight between them was beyond description. Finally, Neelan fastened Pragattan on both sides with his tail, and punched his shoulders, chest and forehead with great force. *Pragattan fell dead like a big mountain. The Devas rejoiced at this, while the frightened Rākshasās ran away in*

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disarray and returned to their ancient city.

At the southern gate, the mighty Angada killed Subārisan, forcing the nocturnal strollers (Rākshasās) to take to their heels. At the western gate, one hundred and two vellam Rākshasa warriors along with heroic Dunmukhan, entered the battle with great fanfare; *but they were all killed by that Yama, known as Hanuman's hand!* Observing the battle at all the four gates, a messenger known as Indradikku rushed to Rāvana, prostrated himself before him and said, "O king, at the northern gate Vajramushti, and at the western gate, the mountain-like Dunmukhan and fifty vellams of our irrepressible soldiers have been killed. When the victorious forces of Rākshasās holding spears moved towards the southern gate with utter fury, commander Subārisan was killed. We are not aware of the fate of those who accompanied him. At the eastern gate, the ever-victorious commander Pragattan, as powerful as your sceptre, fought with his enthusiastic forces but was killed and thrown into the dust, with his life entering heaven." *The words of the messenger were like fire fed with ghee and caused great concern to Rāvana.* The fire of anger came out as sparks from his eyes. Sighing intermittently, Rāvana asked the messenger, "Who took away the precious life of Pragattan?" The messenger replied, "After spreading his fame everywhere, it was Neelan who came to the eastern region to fight with Pragattan. Both were locked in a fierce fight. Neelan finally hit Pragattan's forehead and killed him. Of the Rākshasās who had gone with him, we are the sole survivors." On hearing this, Rāvana ground his teeth several times with great fury. With his cruel eyes, Rāvana looked at the Rākshasās standing near by and said, "Pragattan who had caused distress to Devendra has been killed in the battle by monkeys without a regular army, using only the branches of trees. Like fire, the harsh words of the messenger have burnt my ears as well as my heart. When Meru-like Pragattan has been killed by a monkey as mean as a rat, how can we scoff at our enemies and the fire that is raging outside?" *With his eyes full of tears, Rāvana ordered his huge army of archers to fight whole-heartedly without any thought of retreat. Rāvana who had uprooted Mount Kailas took stock of the war and became furious. Selecting a sturdy chariot, he boarded it.* The chariot, drawn by a thousand horses, was like the huge roaring sea! This chariot was from the celestial region, was surrendered by Devendra to Rāvana when the former had lost his might. Praying to Lord Siva, Rāvana held his long bow firmly in his left hand and twanged it, raising a deafening sound that frightened even Yama. Taking with him countless weapons, Rāvana prepared himself to go to the battlefield wearing a garland of tumbai flowers (worn by warriors) and a shield to protect his

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chest. *With the waving of chowries on either side, Rāvana stood like a big sea with foam on top. With the white pearl umbrella spread over his heads, he looked like a cloud below the white moon.*

War-drums were beaten announcing the arrival of Rāvana at the battlefield. On hearing this, the vānara army scattered. The Devas began sweating and were depressed and the world became nervous. Heralded by the blare of conches and the boom of drums and swarmed by divisions of chariots, cavalry, and infantry, Rāvana appeared majestically in the midst of the mighty army of Rākshasās, looking like the very Meru surrounded by the seven seas during pralaya. Though the emblem of the veena was inscribed on the flag of Rāvana's chariot, his ancient flag which was tossed by the wind that moved in all the eight directions, was an imposing sight like the tongue of Yama. The Devas who had come to see the war, were distressed and left the sky. The flags hoisted loftily on wheeled chariots, the flags held high by Rākshasās, and the flags held by those riding on the backs of elephants, touched the sky and dried the celestial Ganga and the clouds. *Followed by one thousand crore fiends holding weapons in their hands and two thousand select chariots fixed with large and lustrous gems striking terror into the big army of vānaras opposing him, Rāvana who had conquered the three worlds, appeared on the battlefield accompanied by the jubilant roar of able Rākshasās.*

The spies told Rāma that the wicked Rāvana, along with an army as huge as the dark sea, had entered the battlefield in great wrath. *The news made Rāma happy.* He felt he would soon redeem Seeta. His heroic shoulders swelled because the agony of separation had come to an end. Rāma (who could only be discerned through spiritual eyes) had a raiment of bark around his waist and a sturdy sword. *He was adorned with a hero's artistic anklets which were like the ten fingers of the lord of scriptures that had once caught hold of the divine feet of Vāmana as Trivikrama (Lord Tirumāl).* He tightened the shield on his chest since it could not injure Goddess Lakshmi because she was away from his bosom! *Looking at the gloves being slipped over the exquisite lotus hands of Rāma, an incarnation of Lord Tirumāl, one was reminded of a black snake gracefully encircling the branch of a karpaga tree. The shields he fixed on his fingers looked like bees sitting on the red petals of a lotus.* Over his shoulders, he fastened the quiver containing a perennial flow of arrows which were like the uninterrupted flow of appropriate words from the tongues of good-natured, flawless poets who had mastered a sea of literature and also several languages of the world.

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On his forehead, Rāma wore a lustrous gold plate which was like lightning appearing in the midst of a cluster of clouds. He adorned himself with garlands of tulasi and tumbai. Rāma who was the very scriptures that guide all animate and inanimate objects in the world and in whom every object was contained, held a mighty bow making one wonder whether it (the bow) was outside His omnipresence! All the people of the world surrounded by the sea and all those in heaven, showered fresh flowers on Rāma who appeared with the army of wild vānaras like Lord Tirumāl in the big ocean of milk where He used to rest. Rāma joined Lakshmana (who looked as if he was burning the seven worlds in the guise of Lord Siva) standing with his sturdy bow behind the army of vānaras.

The seven seas of Rākshasās and the sea of vānaras (with flashing teeth) clashed in a vigorous battle enabling Yama to discharge his duties expeditiously! The heads of Rākshasa soldiers were cut into pieces. Chariots were destroyed. Horses and their riders were sliced into pieces. The ground swelled with dead bodies and the flood of blood spread everywhere. Innumerable carcasses of monkeys looked like heaps of white gold, while the corpses of Rākshasās, like heaps of stones. Blood flowed like rain water from both the heaps! In the mean time, Rāvana, striking terror among the Devas, with his eyes flashing fire in utter rage, twanged his bow effectively with his gloved hands. Frightening the innumerable vānaras, he sent them running helter-skelter all over the place. *A few of the monkeys ran away in disarray like snakes going into hiding after the striking of thunder.* Some monkeys lost their lives, some got scared, while some others wept. Some monkeys rolled on the battleground. The sound emanating from Rāvana's bow shattered the lofty sky and frightened the armies of Rākshasās and vānaras alike. Vibheeshana, Lakshmana and Sugreeva contemplated on the future course of action, while others ran to the four corners. Even the Devas went into hiding on hearing the terrific sound which resembled the pralaya thunder.

Sugreeva, the vānara leader, took a huge rock and threw it at Rāvana with the force of Devendra's thunderbolt. The rock created a wildfire which was impossible to cross and moved fast towards Rāvana who reduced it to dust with a single arrow! Sugreeva, ejecting fire from his eyes, soon uprooted a big tree with his hands, as though he were tearing the abdomen of the divine earth! Rāvana shot a number of arrows and cut the tree into thousands of pieces. Sugreeva threw a very big mountain at fierce Rāvana who smashed that, too. The latter now shot a powerful arrow which pierced Sugreeva's body. All those who saw this ran amuck. Sugreeva became dazed.

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Watching this, Hanuman, who was at the western front, rushed to the northern front and stood covering Sugreeva. *Turning to Rāvana, Hanuman challenged, "O mighty Rākshasa, have you the courage to fight with me?"* Staring furiously at Hanuman, Rāvana accepted the challenge. Immediately Hanuman dug out a big mountain and threw it at Rāvana who selected ten arrows and cut the mountain into a thousand pieces. With his mighty arms, Hanuman threw another mountain which flew like lightning. Even before Rāvana could aim an arrow at it, the mountain fell on him pulverizing his shoulder ornaments. Rāvana was in agony. Burning with rage, he bent his bow and aimed ten arrows at Hanuman with the intention of piercing his hands, shoulders and chest. Catching these arrows, Hanuman stood calm. This feat was acclaimed by the Devas. Again, Hanuman uprooted a mighty tree, swung it and threw it on Rāvana. It pushed the head of his charioteer and killed many Rākshasās. With another charioteer taking over, Rāvana, like the furious waves of the sea, shot a hundred divine arrows in quick succession. These arrows pierced the body of Hanuman and his blood flowed like a river, causing great agony to him. *Shouting at him haughtily, Rāvana laughed, showing his cruel teeth and said, "With you fighting with stones, trees, empty words, white teeth and shoulders covered by hairy skin, I am afraid to fight with bows and other weapons, because I will be blamed for fighting with one who is not my equal. If I stand before you to fight with a bow, can you ever go back victorious?"*

Like the pralaya thunder, Rāvana shot billions of arrows with golden tips, one surpassing the other, at the army of vānaras who were shaken like the sea caught in a gale. Lakshmana saw the great skill of Rāvana's archery which made his vānara army suffer and also watched how Sugreeva and Hanuman fought him. He arrived like the Meru with a bow and declared, "I will get rid of Rāvana by making him my arrow's target." He pulled the string and raised a frightening sound. On hearing this, the deceptive and dreadful Rākshasās as well as all the worlds were frightened as if they had heard the pralaya thunder. Rāvana watched the panic caused in his army. *Listening to the loud sound that came from Lakshmana's bow (arched like the harsh eyebrows of Yama), Rāvana lifted his crown, saw Lakshmana and exclaimed, "This is after all a man!"* A series of arrows, like closely packed raindrops, shot by Lakshmana, struck the sturdy chariots, rutting elephants, galloping horses and Rākshasās. Lakshmana's arrows pierced through the foreheads of the elephants and came out. Later, the very same arrows forced their way into the Rākshasās' chests and hit the axles of chariots and went far beyond. The Rākshasa army of ten crore warriors, threw

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various weapons at Lakshmana and thought, "Our valour is purposeless if this human enemy is allowed to go near our leader." *The Rākshasās surged towards Lakshmana like beggars rushing towards an alms-giver.* Showering arrows that cut the weapons thrown by the Rākshasās into pieces, Lakshmana steadfastly bore a few of them, too. To the disgust of even Yama, the battleground presented mountains of corpses which prevented the flood of blood reaching the sea. *Lakshmana's arrows severed the heads, legs, and huge shoulders of the Rākshasās, and pierced their chests adorned with golden chains. The three leaves of their tridents were broken. The teeth of the Rākshasās, their victorious bows and even what they had learnt of war, their chariots, their horses as well as their elephants with red eyes were all destroyed. The anklets worn by the heroes, their garlands, their bows and their fame, too, were not spared. Struck by Lakshmana's arrows, these fearless warriors who were hissing like serpents, fell. Over them fell the horses, Over the horses fell the elephants, and over the elephants fell the chariots. Over the series of chariots, severed heads rolled. On that battleground full of blood, there was no empty space for anything else to fall.*

While the Devas with their unblinking eyes were able to watch Lakshmana unleashing arrows in quick succession, they were unable either to see his feeding these arrows into his bow-string, or his actual shooting of them; nor could they see Lakshmana's arrows attacking foes. They saw only dense heaps of corpses lying on the ground. The Rākshasās' deadly weapons, like swords, spears, tridents and fierce bows, were all cut into hundreds of pieces by Lakshmana's arrows. Not a weapon was spared. Rock-like elephants, proud horses, chariots with flags, ferocious yālis, lions and other animals which went to the battleground were countless. But they could neither stand nor move, for, attacked by Lakshmana's arrows they all fell flat on the ground. The heads of the Rākshasās rolled. Their lives became extinct and the army was trounced. *Only Lakshmana's sturdy bow wore the garland of victory.* Watching this, Rāvana's mind began burning like the red pralaya fire. He fought aggressively with his chariot yoked to horses galloping as fast as wind. Staring sternly with fiery eyes, like Yama, Lakshmana met his opponent, Rāvana. *With anger as his companion, Lakshmana told Rāvana, "You deceitful thief! You undermined the might of my great vigil over Seeta! You cannot escape from me now."* Heaving an angry sigh and emitting smoke, Lakshmana selected and dispatched fiery and deadly arrows, capable of removing the enemies' heads. But Lakshmana's arrows, as though bound by a curse, could not touch Rāvana. They were all cut into pieces by Rāvana's arrows. Challenging Rāvana to destroy the fresh set of arrows, Lakshmana showered powerful

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arrows like a rain of clouds that could destroy the world. Even these were treated by Rāvana like showers that rained during the cool season. He destroyed Lakshmana's quiver and prevented him from using any more arrows.

Hanuman who recovered from his exhaustion, looked at Rāvana furiously and asked him not to indulge in any unfair fighting. Standing in front of Rāvana's chariot, Hanuman demanded of him that he should suspend his fight and said, "Listen to my words. You have won the three worlds with your might, consumed the name of Devendra and vanquished the regional elephants. But today you are nearing your end." Hanuman then showed his gigantic and tall appearance, like Lord Tirumāl who measured the three worlds. Hanuman, who is recognised as the divine feet of Lord Tirumal, grew tall and lifted his right hand which spread all over the world. He showed his awesome figure to Rāvana and told him, "You are trained very well in battles. Do fight with me. It is not enough if you simply stand in front of me like a hero. *All your fortitude, your great might in destroying the fourteen worlds, your arduous labour, your unique position and the valour of your shoulders will vanish along with your fame, with a single punch from me.* What purpose will be served by speaking at length of several things? O mighty Rāvana, you were not shaken either by Mount Kailas, or by the fiery-eyed elephants of the eight regions. But can you withstand the assault of my fist? O proud possessor of mountainous shoulders, if you survive my punch, I will allow you to hit me with your fist and will not oppose you even if I survive your attack."

Rāvana, who was looking darker than a cloud, lauded Hanuman and told him, "You have spoken words that befit a hero. None other than you can challenge me, exceptional as I am. *Is this world wide enough for the spread of your fame?* O great Hanuman, single-handed, without a weapon, you killed my kin. You now stand in front of me (with your strength) for a fight, despite the fact that I possess a mighty bow, a lofty chariot, and a huge army. Can anyone equal you in valour? Not among the Trinity of Gods nor in the three worlds, can an eccentric like you be found who dares to stand before me. I possess twenty arms for fighting. The fame I have earned in warfare is great. O hero with a formidable figure dwarfing even rutting elephants in their might! You have only two arms. You have challenged me and said you would punch me and that I could hit you back if I survive. If a mere monkey like you has the courage to stand before me (the great Rāvana) and challenge me, where is the need for any victory for me? I should desist from fighting. *The pride of having won all the eight regions has been wiped out by the disgrace I have suffered.* My dear son,

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Akshakumāran, was smashed on the ground and slain by you. The blood that flowed has not yet dried. Unique as I am, you have stood before me and challenged me. There is no use talking any more. I stand ashamed of the ignominy of having to fight you. Come quickly and punch me for all the world to see!"

Hanuman wondered at the courage of Rāvana. With furious eyes and a loud roar, he jumped on Rāvana's chariot, and punched his chest with his diamond-like hand, eager to shatter his body to pieces along with the shield protecting him. The shock waves created by Hanuman's punch pulverized even mighty mountains, made the eyes of Rāvana shed fire and the heads of Rākshasās fall, causing the death of several of them. Monkeys shed their hair and teeth. Clouds sent showers from the sky. The strings slipped from bows, sea-shores disappeared, mountains everywhere shed their rocks, the sun and moon shed their rays and the elephants guarding the eight directions lost their teeth. All the warriors fell unable to hold their weapons. *Owing to Hanuman's punch, mighty Rāvana's handsome chest blazed and the tusks of the wild elephants of the eight regions that had remained in his chest came out through his back as if to announce the end of his fame.* Hanuman's punch was so strong that it shook the nine gems off Rāvana's crowns and they fell like shining stars in all the regions. Rāvana who had hurt dharma, stood with his eyes sparking and became despondent like a staggering Meru mountain. The jubilant celestials showered fragrant flowers on Hanuman and extolled him. The Rākshasās, however, began to sweat, while the vānaras felt that Hanuman had put an end to Rāvana's victories. They danced in ecstasy and their hair stood on end.

Like the soul coming out of a body and re-entering if after some time, Rāvana lost his senses for a while and got them back. Rāvana, with his twenty shoulders resembling the branches of a tree, heaved a sigh. Spitting fire in utter rage, he told Hanuman, "O incomparable one, you have made me suffer in a manner I have never suffered before. It is now my turn. Come before me. If there is something known as strength it rests only with you. All other heroes when compared to you can only be regarded as eunuchs. In all the seven worlds, your fame has spread. Not even the slightest exhaustion would touch me even if I am cursed by Lord Brahma. Only through you have I known weariness! You have vanquished me. Now, let me challenge you. I will punch your chest, like fierce thunder striking the mountains during pralaya. Should you survive this attack, there will be none equal to you, and you will have no enemies. You will live for ever." As Rāvana advanced towards Hanuman, the latter showed his chest and said, "You have survived my punch and managed to talk.

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You have done well. You have vanquished me." Rāvana bit his long lips, ground his teeth, threw sparks from his eyes, shouted furiously striking terror in all the regions and folded his fingers into his palm. Finally, he punched Hanuman's chest fiercely. Mightier than the mightiest, Hanuman who would not be shaken even if the deep sea inundated the wide world, when punched by the vile Rāvana, became depressed like the depressed silvery Mount Kailas! *As a result of Hanuman's depression, the celestial world of the Devas, dharma, truth, virtues, the scriptures, justice, compassion and penance were all depressed!* In the mean time, each one of the vānara commanders started carrying a rock and collectively threw billions of rocks at Rāvana. Out of sheer fright, the Devas deserted the sky. The rocks, falling one over the other, created thunder. The sparks emitted by the clashing of rocks looked like lightning, while the shadow of the moving rocks looked like a huge rainbow. The moving rocks shedding dust looked like clouds raining stones. The rocks hurled by the monkeys threw the big army of Rākshasās into disarray. Their airborne chariots crashed. The hot sparks from the rocks that fell into it completely dried up the sea. Even the eyeballs of the Rākshasās were charred. There were loud cries that the world was coming to an end. When Rāvana heard them, he became furious. He took up his bow which in earlier days had brought him fame and had inflicted sufferings on the Devas. Bending the bow, he shot billions of arrows which smashed the rocks and trees directed against him by the vānaras, into a hundred thousand pieces. Watching Rāvana's masterly handling of the bow, the Devas trembled. The vānaras continued to throw rocks at him but his arrows destroyed all of them. The rocks which fell to pieces, filled the seas in all the four regions. The dust thrown up in the battlefield covered the bodies lying on the ground and dried their blood.

With great rage, Rāvana asserted, "This very moment, I shall kill the army of monkeys and vanquish these two men." He took ten big sturdy bows in his ten left hands and shot thousands of powerful arrows which resembled the torrential rains of pralaya. The sky, the earth, the mighty sea and the eight regions were replete with arrows. Filled with blood, the battlefield looked like the red evening sky. The vānaras were shot dead by the arrows coming at them from everywhere. *Clouds settled over the mountain of vānara carcasses. Shot by an arrow, Neelan could not move. Aniyan could not stand. Gavayan, though attacked, did not go to the abode of Yama. Hit by a poisonous arrow, Angada was despondent. A trident-like arrow, paralysed Jāmbavan.* The rest of the vānara warriors were deprived of their valour and masculinity as a result of the sharp arrows piercing their vital parts. The vast army surrounding them

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was also destroyed. Those vānaras who survived the attack ran away from the battlefield. *Watching this, the bull-like Lakshmana became furious.* Fighting with his arrows, he shattered the billions of arrows shot by Rāvana and broke all the bows in his hands. The Devas rejoiced and raised an uproar. The Rākshasās began sweating and were plunged into despair. Great sages showered flowers. Dharma danced in ecstasy and lauded Lakshmana. Extolling the might of Lakshmana's shoulders, Rāvana said, *"Your fighting prowess is superb. The way you handle the bow is excellent. Your herioc look, the grace with which you shoot arrows, your knowledge of war and your courage are all fine. Neither Rāma who had destroyed the mighty Khara and his army, nor my son Indrajit who, with his unique archery, had defeated Devendra, nor I holding a sturdy bow, nor anyone else can match you."*

Peeved that Lakshmana could not be defeated by his bow, Rāvana ground his teeth in anger. He proudly raised the spear given to him by Lord Brahma, and hurled it at Lakshmana. The deadly spear burnt all the arrows shot by Lakshmana and made them fall as sparks of fire. *Leaping fast and spitting fire, the spear struck Lakshmana's chest.* Knowing the nature of the divine weapon, Lakshmana fell 'unconscious'. The big army of vānaras, on seeing this, began to run away from the battlefield in utter confusion. The Devas were in grief and the sages became restless. The Rākshasās were in ecstasy. They raised a roar twice as loud as the roar of the sea. *The earth began to spin, unable to bear the shock.* The brightness of the sun was affected. The poison-hearted Rāvana, realising that Lakshmana had not lost his life and was unafraid of Brahma's spear, reached Lakshmana to carry away his body. After wading through the blood-spilled path where heaps of corpses lay, Rāvana with his twenty hands grasped the body of Lakshmana. He was reminded of the humiliation he had suffered when he tried to lift the silvery Mount Kailas and was crushed underneath. *It appeared as though, he was trying to wipe out that humiliation by lifting a golden mountain (Lakshmana) now.*

Praying to Lord Tirumāl, Lakshmana realised that he himself was the Lord, and was in full command of his senses. He became so enormously heavy, that Rāvana could not lift him. The dark, ten-headed Rāvana who tried to lift Lakshmana, looked like the sea. His twenty hands were like the mighty waves. Lakshmana with his tulasi garland resembled the sun rising from the sea. Rāvana, not possessing enough strength to lift the body of Lakshmana, heaved a hot sigh. Hanuman who was standing in a corner, suddenly arrived, lifted Lakshmana in his hands and ran fast to

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another place without allowing anyone to intercept him. *Hanuman, the greatest among all scholars, empowered by his profound love for and devotion to Lakshmana, carried him away easily. Though a male, Hanuman appeared like a mother-monkey carrying her offspring and giving shelter to it on the branch of a tree.* Resembling a red lion, Lakshmana who was drowsy because of the spear thrown by the lustful Rāvana, regained his senses in a few minutes. Hanuman then rushed to Rāma. Acclaimed as a mighty lion riding furiously on an elephant, Rāma proceeded to fight with Rāvana. On seeing this, the Devas rejoiced and showered flowers on him. Holding a spear with raw flesh sticking to it Rāvana rode on his chariot and faced Rāma. The sight of Rāvana, the warmonger, riding on a chariot and Rāma walking alone on foot, moved Hanuman. He felt that it would be an unequal fight. He rushed to Rāma and pleaded, "My Lord, while Rāvana will be fighting from a chariot drawn by a thousand horses, you will be fighting on foot. This is unfair. Though I am slim, please sit on my shoulders and fight." Rāma agreed and mounted Hanuman's shoulders like a killer-lion climbing a mountain. The Devas assembled and offered their blessings. Hanuman rejoiced like a cow, bearing her offspring! Aware of the great form of Tirumāl who once measured the world as Vāmana, Hanuman was amazed at his new experience!

Garuda, the celestial bird, who, all along had the exclusive privilege of carrying Tirumāl, felt ashamed that Hanuman had now usurped the role. Even Ādisesha on whom Tirumāl rested on the ocean of milk became nervous. To say that Hanuman was like the divine ocean of milk and Rāma was like Tirumāl would be inaccurate, because Rāma did not sleep here. We can at best say that Hanuman was like the scriptures, while Rāma was like the very finality of the scriptures. If we look at the greatness of the victorious Hanuman who stood as a fitting mount for Rāma, it could be said that Hanuman resembled the essence of the scriptures meant for scholarly sages, while Rāma seated on the shoulders of Hanuman resembled the supreme heaven above! The sages blessed them, while the goddess of dharma waved her flawless hands! Lord Siva and Brahma appeared in the sky with other celestials to witness the battle between Rāma and Rāvana.

Rāma announced his intentions by twanging his mighty bow. The loud sound resembled Siva's great roar as He swallowed the universe during pralaya. On hearing the sound of Rāma's bow, the Rākshasās and others trembled and became destabilised though they did not give up their lives. All the worlds, too, were shaken. Even the fearless Lord Siva and Brahma trembled. Rāvana immediately shot seven wild red arrows which were like the pralaya fire. Capable of consuming all the water of the sea,

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they could pierce the earth and the sky. *Rāma retaliated with seven arrows which cut Rāvana's arrows into seven pieces.* In addition, Rāma shot another set of five deadly arrows. These arrows spat sparks of fire which humbled even the submarine pralaya fire. Rāvana possessing the might of a yāli, replied with five powerful arrows which repelled Rāma's five arrows. Rāvana again shot ten arrows which were destroyed by an equal number of arrows shot by Rāma the Lord of the Védas. With his arrows, Rāma destroyed the different weapons directed at him by the Rākshasās standing by the side of Rāvana, and demolished the rocks hurled by them. Plucking their heads with his arrows, Rāma created mountains out of them. *Hanuman moved faster than the mind and faster than the arrows of Rāma who was on his shoulders. By the time one thought that Hanuman was moving on the earth, he would suddenly be in the sky. Moving in the eyes of all the Rākshasās, he would be seen in all the ten faces of Rāvana at the same time.*

Headless trunks danced in the battlefield. Along with them the fiends also sang and danced. Hands (resembling cut palmyrah trees), tusks, big elephants and horses were carried by the continuous river of blood into the sea, while chariot-wheels and their axles were broken by Rāma's unique arrows. The horses drawing the chariots lost their manes, and black mountainous elephants lost their lives and rolled on the ground. The Rākshasās lost their chariots, their fierce bows, their elephants with cruel eyes, the legs of their bridled horses, their valour, sturdy shields and also their heads. The Rākshasis, with their snake-like waists, unable to match the severed heads of horses and elephants (which resembled their husbands' heads) with the trunks of their husbands, became unconscious and died. The shouting of the Rākshasās subsided. Their eyes stopped spitting sparks of fire. Their hands no longer handled weapons. The dust engulfing the entire world settled down and the war-drums became silent. Rāma's arrows, known as Yama, severed a hundred thousand Rākshasa heads and killed crores of enemy warriors. Only Rāvana with his chariot was spared. Heaps of broken chariots and bodies of horses, elephants and Rākshasās, filled the battleground, with no space to move. Rāvana, holding a sturdy bow, was like a furious serpent. He instantly bent his bow and shot two mighty arrows towards Rāma's two strong shoulders which resembled emerald mountains. Rāma smiled. He fed a sharp unerring arrow into his bow and pulled the string. The arrow broke Rāvana's bow, like the pralaya wind breaking the Mandara mountain. When Rāvana took another bow, Rāma shot that, too, in the middle and severed the heads of the horses drawing Rāvana's chariot. *After the bow was broken, Rāvana's attempt to use other fierce weapons was foiled, as these weapons, too, were destroyed by Rāma's sharp arrows.*

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The victorious royal white umbrella, the flag with the emblem of veena and the binding cord of the lustrous shield of Rāvana were all shattered by Rāma.

In that battlefield, a number of chariots came for Rāvana one after another. As and when they arrived, they were all split into pieces by Rāma's lustrous fierce arrows. In the mire of blood in the battlefield, red-eyed Yama danced with his hands aloft! While Rāvana was in great fury, Rāma shot an arrow at his crowns shining with gems. Possessing the unique prowess of Hanuman who had once jumped on the sun, Rāma's arrow struck the gem-set golden crowns adorning the heads of Rāvana and threw them into the sea. Rāvana now appeared like the Meru with its peak uprooted and flung into the sea by rash winds. Rāvana's crowns looked like the fierce-rayed sun falling into the roaring sea along with the 'serpent' Kétu who had swallowed him. *By losing his crowns, Rāvana, who had all along known only victory and never any defeat, appeared like the day without the sun and the night without the moon. Like a great person losing all his glory the moment he is cursed by a powerful great poet with a verse known as Angadam, the cruel Rāvana who was once famous in all the worlds, appeared in the battlefield bereft of his fame the moment he lost his gem-set crowns. Having forfeited his pride, Rāvana's eyes were downcast. His faces lost all lustre. His body looked like a mighty banyan tree with the roots falling down from the branches. Those who saw him, declared that the lives of all who transgressed dharma would only end like this! Rāvana's complexion became darker than before. Drawing lines on the ground with his toes, he stood on the battlefield.*

Looking at the pitiable condition of Rāvana who stood before him with bare hands, Rāma thought it was unfair to kill him. He told Rāvana, "Your cruel acts have done you no good. Bear in mind that even the Devas can win wars only through dharma and not by foul means. Return at once to your big city and go back to your kin. You sinner, I can kill you now. I am not doing so because you are alone! O lowly Rākshasa indulging in mean acts, if you have the prowess for a fight, come here again with weapons, with your armies (which you have kept in your palace) and your Rākshasa clan, and fight me. Or else, go into hiding. I will refrain from severing your heads with my arrows and throwing them on the ground if you release Seeta and obey Vibheeshana, your brother, after crowning him king of Lanka in a fitting manner. If you will not do so, and if you think you can still offer fight, do come back to me with all your strength. Call me for a straight fight, and die honourably. That will be good for you. But do not think that once you enter the battlefield, you can go back alive. O

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ruler, you have seen how your armies have been shattered like silk-cotton before a storm. *As you are unfit now, go back today, and return tomorrow for the fight." Thus spoke the charitable Rāma of the fertile and bountiful land of Kōsala.*

15. KUMBHAKARNA

Rāvana returned to his city, empty-handed. He had lost in the battlefield his ten crowns adorned with garlands, the might of his chest that had fought with the regional elephants, his broad shoulders which had excavated Mount Kailas, his sweet tongues acclaimed by Sage Nārada, the sword given to him by Lord Sankara and his great heroism. Rāvana, once the master of the three worlds, now walked without his chariot into the city of Lanka, in utter disgrace, with his hands dangling. By then, the sun had reached the western horizon! Rāvana neither looked in the eight directions, nor at his rich city, or his own sons, or his vast army. Even as his wives including beautiful Mandōdhari and the women of the city stood looking at him, deeply depressed, Rāvana hurried inside, downcast, looking only at the 'damsel' known as the Earth. The eyes of women whose faces resembled blooming lotuses caused only agony to him. They pierced the once victorious Rāvana like swords! *The words of his sons wounded him like Rāma's arrows. The soft breasts of women were to Rāvana as futile as his useless shoulders. With his ministers, his lustrous wives, his army commanders and his relatives standing like dolls, Rāvana went into his palace all alone like an elephant with red powder on its face returning to its stable!*

Partially recovering from his agony, Rāvana sat up deep in thought. He ordered one of his bodyguards to summon his messengers. Thousands of them, including experts like Managati, Vāyuvekan, Maruttan, Māmekan and others arrived. Rāvana told them, "I want Rākshasas to be brought here faster than the speed of thought, from all the eight regions, from the seven islands surrounded by the seven big seas, from the countless big mountains, from the infernal regions under the earth and from the Cakravala mountain ranges." The messengers went about the task with implicit obedience. The attendants from the three worlds who regularly waited on Rāvana, trembled with fear unable to make out what was in his in mind. *Rāvana reached his flowery bed like an elephant, pierced by a sharp spear, marching towards its resting-place.* His heart which was filled with thoughts of Seeta, was broken now with acute shame and sorrow making him inactive. Giving vent to the shame which had filled his mind, sleepless Rāvana heaved a hot sigh. *Diamond-shouldered Rāvana was not ashamed that the celestial and other enemies whom*

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he had ridiculed earlier would scoff at him. He withered with shame only at the thought that beautiful Seeta from Mithila with her crimson lips and long eyes (mocking the vél) would laugh at him!

Rāvana's grandfather, the hunchbacked Māliyavān, came and sat on a cushioned seat near Rāvana's bed. Studying Rāvana's condition, Māliyavān said, "You appear to have suffered defeat in the present war. You look concerned and your mind and shoulders look withered. What actually happened?" Rāvana was in agony. His eyes were fiery. He was blowing hot air through his ten noses. His tongues became dry. They ceased to relish the taste of even liquid jaggery or nectar! He told Māliyavān, "War has begun between those victorious men in ascetic attire and us. To witness this, the Devas, too, have assembled. We, who were never defeated, were humiliated on the red battleground swarming with vultures. *O beloved elder, even if Lord Siva and all the three worlds were to assist me and my huge army, if Lakshmana were to shoot his powerful arrows from his great bow, we would be unable to stand before him.* Countless Rākshasās were killed by Rāma in the battle. An arrow shot by him subjected me to humiliation. Still, he was as calm as he was when he shot balls of mud from his bow at that hunchbacked Kooni to restore her to normalcy! He never showed real anger during the fight. Though the army of gigantic Rākshasās numbered two hundred vellams, the accurately aimed arrows shot by Rāma severed the heads of horses, elephants and warriors without resting on a single body. *Rāma's relentless arrows capable of burning even the pralaya fire, can penetrate the entire world. They scorch even the mouths that protest.* Breaking the Meru in two, they fly far beyond the sky and squeeze the water out of the seas. Several crores of Merus, earths, skies and seas would be needed to withstand Rāma's arrows. Even the Devas are baffled by the rapidity with which he feeds the arrows into his sturdy bow and the speed with which he shoots them. *The moment he commands his arrows to kill the Rākshasās, the entire world is filled with arrows. They are like the rhythmic verses flowing continuously from the tongue of a learned poet and resemble the boundless musical notes with innumerable facets of flawless beauty.* I have seen the speed and fierceness of Devendra's Vajrāyudham, the mystic Trident handled by Lord Siva and Lord Tirumāl's circular Disc. There is a vast difference between these weapons, and Rāma's arrows. *Even I cannot face them, while none else can even see them! The eight shoulders of Lord Siva, the two shoulders of Devendra, and the thousand shoulders of Lord Tirumāl, cannot match a single finger of that Rāma.*

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"Though the red-eyed Lord Tirumāl is a great hero, I do not think that there is anyone comparable to Kārtaveeryārjuna. Even he cannot equal even the dust on Lakshmana's feet. Where then is the question of anyone fighting him? Lord Siva's fierce and mighty bow, which scorched the triple citadels, cannot be compared even light-heartedly to Rāma's wonderful bow. *Scriptures may err, but the arrows flowing from Rāma's bow are unerring.* When fed to the bow, they resemble Lord Brahma with four heads. When flying, they are like Hari (Lord Tirumāl). When assembled to destroy the enemies, they look like Lord Siva during pralaya. These arrows have wiped away even my unending arrogance. Is further evidence needed to prove their power? I am not aware of the direction in which Rāma's mighty bow is held. Whether it is towards the western side or the eastern, towards one of the corners of the world, or towards the northern side or the southern side, or the left or the right, I am yet to find out! *Rāma does not have air, fire, or Yama for a mount. He has only a monkey. Even the great Garuda is incapable of the heroic deeds of this monkey. If one were to ridicule the greatness of this mount, it can only be attributed to one's ignorance.* Seeta who is as patient as Mother Earth and possesses bamboo-like arms, has seen and known Rāma's body and his heroic acts. For her, Manmatha and all of us are like curs. O Māliyavān, at a time when my end draws near, besides the ordinary enemies like Devendra, Tirumāl, and Siva, I have acquired a good and powerful enemy in Rāma. This is what has happened." *Māliyavān replied, "O Rāvana, when I told you earlier about the great might of Rāma, you frowned at me needlessly. Nor did you agree with the sweet words of your calm younger brother, Vibheeshana.* Though we had reasons to justify our assertions, you chose not to examine them. Can any word be said refuting what you say now? Your loyal and true relatives, after deep thought, told you of the events to come. As they were irksome to your mind, you ignored them. You are going to witness the destruction of all your relatives, your friends, your wealth and education, and your invincible army."

Mahōdaran, an expert in sorcery, who was standing aside, quickly came up to Māliyavān, looked at him with fiery eyes, and asked, "Why do you say such lowly words?" Uttering things which were not good for weak minded Rāvana, Mahōdaran said, "Once we have decided that it is good to acquire a certain object, it does not matter whether we succeed or fail. It is honourable for noble ones to remain steadfast. If we withdraw, we will only go to hell in disgrace. Lord Siva who scorched the three citadels with His arrow and Lord Tirumāl who measured the three worlds with His feet, were defeated by you! Are you really afraid of the war waged by these two men?

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The learned have said that those who have won today will lose tomorrow and those who have lost now will win later. Those who are highly placed at present may go down and those who are lowly now may become exalted! That is the way of the world! Is there any limit to capabilities? How can you extol the prowess of these two ordinary persons, Rāma and Lakshmana? If Seeta is released from captivity, it will mean the total negation of your might. Why should your indestructible fame be brought to ridicule? O protector! Please dispel your fears at once. If you delay going to war, the crowd of monkeys will treat Lanka and us as trees and fruits and will destroy us. Why should you be concerned that the sun has consumed a little water from the cool sea? Why do you slight your brother Kumbhakarna, by respecting these two men who are like dewdrops on a blade of grass? Bring Kumbhakarna and send him to the front. His very mountain-like figure will make our enemies go into hiding. If, however, a confrontation should take place, Kumbhakarna by himself can consume the lives of the two ascetics, Rāma and Lakshmana." Rāvana who heard Mahōdaran with attention, said, "*O wise one, you deserve all the wealth in the world. You know what is proper. Your love for me knows no bounds. You have only said what is good for me.*"

Rāvana recovered from his dejection. *If one is destined to perish, can any force prevent it?* Rāvana agreed with Mahōdaran and asked the messengers to run and fetch Kumbhakarna. Immediately four messengers hastened (like Yama's messengers) to Kumbhakarna's palace. Reaching its entrance which touched the clouds, these messengers urged Kumbhakarna to wake up. They attacked his head and ears with iron rods. *As he did not respond, they said in a fit of anger, "O sleeping Kumbhakarna, your illusory life is about to disappear. Wake up to see it. Go and sleep in the arms of the messengers of Yama going about in the sky. The ephemeral lives of the Rākshasās which once appeared imperishable, are now on the verge of extinction owing to the misdeeds of your brother, Rāvana. When your death is certain, why do you still sleep?"* The messengers tried to wake Kumbhakarna up by joggling him with their hands. Their hands turned red but Kumbhakarna slept on. When the messengers returned to Rāvana, he ordered that thousands of elephants, horses and yālis be employed to walk on Kumbhakarna to wake him up. Even after being pounded and trampled by these beasts, Kumbhakarna did not rise from his slumber. The four messengers reported this to Rāvana who immediately ordered thousands of wrestlers of repute to wake up Kumbhakarna. *The moment these wrestlers entered his palace, they were pulled forward and pushed backward by his harsh and forceful breathing!*

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Holding hands, they managed to get inside the palace and trembled at the sight of his ferocious and huge mouth and nose. Wondering how to wake him up, and afraid even to touch his hands, they carried conches and trumpets close to his huge deep ears and raised a deafening noise. With sturdy maces and large hammers they attacked Kumbhakarna's jaws, chest, head and waist. Even then he did not wake up. This was also duly reported to Rāvana who immediately directed his horses to ride on the body of Kumbhakarna.

A thousand swift bridled horses galloped several times over Kumbhakarna's chest. But Kumbhakarna only felt as if he was being patted gently and sank into a deeper slumber. The messengers went back to Rāvana and said, "Our sincere efforts to awaken Kumbhakarna have failed. Our hands, as well as the legs of the galloping horses have lost their might. Please let us know what else we have to do." *Rāvana replied, "Kumbhakarna possesses a physique that even an army of chariots, elephants, horses, and infantry cannot injure. Though accustomed to uninterrupted sleep, he is a brother who will never desert me. Wake him up by using tridents, battle-axes and other weapons, and then bring him before me."* Thousands of Rākshasās, after paying their respects to Rāvana, immediately, went to the sleeping Kumbhakarna. They attacked his cheeks with long pestles. As a result, Kumbhakarna rose from his bed, like a dead person coming to life, instilling fear into the three worlds, the regional elephants, the sun, and even the Trinity of Gods. He stood up like Lord Tirumāl who measured the earth with a single pace. Kumbhakarna's head touched heaven. His body covered the whole sky. His eyes were bigger than oceans. Not finding his usual fried meat or pots of toddy the moment he got up from his slumber, his face became deathly! As soon as food was brought before him, Kumbhakarna, with a furious face and two red eyes, swallowed six hundred cart-loads of boiled rice and hundreds of pots of toddy. These only served to whet his appetite. So while waiting for the prestigious royal food, Kumbhakarna, who was capable of squeezing thunder and blowing it into sparks of fire, devoured twelve hundred buffaloes and appeased his hunger!

Kumbhakarna, with his eyebrows resembling the curling waves of the sea, was accustomed to sound sleep. From the flesh consumed by him, he used to squeeze blood into his mouth. He now got up and sat. *A seated Kumbhakarna had the physical stature of a standing Rāvana.* Kumbhakarna had the habit of eating flesh dripping with blood, along with the bones and skin! Kumbhakarna would suddenly feel that the remedy for his appetite was to eat weapons made of steel! He would then laugh

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at his own stupidity, displaying his teeth. Eating elephants that came by, he would go after toddy. Kumbhakarna had hands which held sharp tridents, a physique that resembled dark clouds, enough arrogance to fight even Yama, heroic feet that were adorned with anklets and a shock of red hair that stood on end. He had once dashed the mighty Devendra against the top of the fort-wall, and broken it. The mere sight of him made the Devas extremely nervous. Such was his might that he resembled a submarine pralaya fire! *His heavy eyelids looked like the caves of Meru where Agni used to hide afraid of Rāvana's wrath!*

Rāvana's messengers informed Kumbhakarna that he was wanted by his elder brother. Amidst loud cheers from the citizens of Lanka, mountain-like Kumbhakarna entered Rāvana's lofty palace which appeared to touch the moon. Like an upright mountain falling flat on the earth, Kumbhakarna holding a deadly spear, fell flat on the ground and paid obeisance to Rāvana, the king of Lanka. *As soon as Kumbhakarna paid his respects to Rāvana, the latter embraced him tightly with his sturdy arms, like a stable mountain embracing another mountain which, with its long legs, had arrived to meet the former.* Asking his brother to sit by his side, Rāvana arranged pots of blood, toddy and meat for Kumbhakarna, and adorned him with lustrous ornaments, gems, and white silk resembling the foam of the sea. When Devendra, mounted on his elephant, Irāvatam, had run away from Rāvana, its face-plate had fallen off. Rāvana tied this gem-studded face-plate on Kumbhakarna's forehead and smeared sandalwood paste over his ocean-like body. Kumbhakarna now looked like an elephant covered by sandalwood 'mire'. Over his huge chest, Rāvana fastened the protective shield gifted to him by Lord Siva. Kumbhakarna stood up with his curly eyebrows, red hair and lofty shoulders. His left side throbbed. He asked Rāvana the reason for the martial preparations. Rāvana replied, "Our city is now surrounded by an army of monkeys led by two men. In the war that has progressed so far, they have been victorious. It is now given to you to finish the task of sucking their sweet lives."

Kumbhakarna became sad. He asked, "Has the fierce war started? Has not the agony of Seeta (with infinite chastity) been removed yet? Has your lofty fame been destroyed? Has the war been caused by the lustrous golden Seeta? Have you not borne in mind the curses of Nandi and Védavati and released Seeta who has the venom of a cobra in her eyes? This is only because of harsh fate! *O lord, excavating the world or even fencing it are possible, but defeating the might of Rāma's shoulders is as impossible for you as embracing Seeta's body!* Your perfect dynasty, which had its

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origin in that great Pulastya, and our victorious race, are about to be destroyed because of your actions. Can one who forsakes dharma ever succeed? *The quality of ground water depends on the quality of the land.* Forsaking dharma, you have indirectly given your kingdom to Devendra and brought peril to your kin. You have sought your own downfall. Release all the Devas. There is no other way for you to escape from the effects of your sinful acts. Fearing you, dharma has gone into hiding. Because you did once adhere to dharma, though grudgingly, you had obtained wealth and gained esteem. If you discard dharma now, who will come forward to redeem you? *The three things that guide good persons are their thoughts, words and deeds. Doing universal good, they are full of mercy and dharma. By antagonising these virtuous persons can we ever survive, especially when we are steeped in deceit, vices and falsehood?*

"The vānaras who were able to cross the black sea like the wind, are assisting our enemies. Imprisoned Seeta has not been able to come out. The arrows which had pierced Vāli's chest are still with our enemies; and we are here to be killed by the very same arrows! What can be worse than this?" Sorrrowful Kumbhakarna concluded, "O lord, there is one more piece of advice I wish to offer. If you reject it, consider yourself already dead with no place to go to. *The only way for you to survive is to release Seeta, fall at the divine feet of Rāma and become friendly with Vibheeshana who is beyond suspicion.* Failing this, there is yet another thing which you can do. Instead of sending our troops in batches one after another and grieving after they are slain, we may exert our full might collectively in the war against our enemies!" *Rāvana replied, "You were not called here to know about future events. Your task is only to kill these men indulging in mean acts. You are not a knowledgeable minister of mine.* You are frightened. Your valour is wasted. Through your words, you have lost the right to enter the war and exhibit your prowess. You have already consumed plenty of toddy and meat. Go, shut your eyes, and sleep day and night. It looks as though your duty as well as Vibheeshana's is to worship those two humble men, salute the hunchbacked monkeys and protect your bodies just to survive. I will never indulge in such an act. You may now get up and go." Rāvana then asked for his chariot and weapons. He wanted an announcement to be made that he was proceeding to the battlefield. He challenged, "Let all in heaven, earth and other places, join these two mighty youths and fight with me." Kumbhakarna who saw Rāvana getting ready to go to war, prostrated himself at his feet and said, "Please bear with me." Preparing himself to proceed to the battlefield, Kumbhakarna held his mighty trident in his right hand and

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declared, "I do not hope to return victorious from the war. *Destiny is pushing me by my neck to inexorable death.* If it happens, it will be a noble act for you to release that beautiful golden-shouldered Seeta. O protector of Lanka, if our foes defeat me, they are sure to defeat you, too. Therefore, at least after my death, it is better for you to hand over Seeta to Rāma in a fitting manner without any hesitation. Such an action will confer on you the benefits of penance. Indrajit is certain to be killed by the divine arrow of Lakshmana. The Rākshasa forces will also be blown like ash before a gust of wind. Visualise the imminent destruction that faces you. Perform deeds that will bring good to yourself. *O victorious king, if I have committed any faults from the beginning till now, please forgive me. I will not see you again. I have taken leave of you."*

Rāvana's eyes were filled with tears and blood. Kumbhakarna's relatives were all sad. By then he had reached the outskirts of the city. Rāvana commanded that an announcement be made that his brother Kumbhakarna would enter the battlefield with a mighty weapon-wielding army. A huge army immediately arrived raising a great deal of dust that rose into the sky and covered the heads of the celestials. The flags flying on the chariots, the flags held aloft by the warriors riding elephants and the flags flying in the front rows of the army were all seen very close to one another. They seemed to be cleansing the celestial region of the dust that rose from the battleground. The precious weapons seen everywhere clashed with each other producing sparks of fire. These, along with the sparks flying from the eyes of the commanders, scorched the clouds. The armies marched with the chariots in front followed closely by elephants with red dots on their faces. Behind these elephants rode another complement of chariots followed by horses galloping like the wind. As the space between the front row and the hind rows was cramped, it appeared as though the army that was caught in between floated in the air. Kumbhakarna boarded a special chariot drawn by a thousand lions, a thousand elephants and a thousand fiends. The chariot was fitted with lustrous gems and was as heavy as the earth. The armies that followed Kumbhakarna were equipped with javelins, tridents, clubs, arrows, dreadful spears, swords, ploughs, iron-pestles, beautiful bows and lances. *Rākshasa servants with crescent-moon-like teeth accompanied Kumbhakarna carrying with them a thousand cart-loads of meat fried in fragrant ghee and numerous pots of toddy to be given to him whenever he wanted. He received varieties of meat and consumed them while proceeding towards the battleground. The Devas ran away saying, "Even Yama knows that neither the monkeys nor other living beings are adequate to satiate Kumbhakarna's hunger."*

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The graceful Rāma saw the ebullient Kumbhakarna coming in a golden chariot as though the Meru had come along with the earth. The flag flying sky-high on the chariot did not have Rāvana's symbol of the veena but had that of a lion. A measure of Kumbhakarna's broad chest could not be had even when viewed with the speed of the mind! Rāma wondered, "It will take a number of days to see this monster's shoulders from left to right at a stretch! Is it the Meru that has come here?" He asked Vibheeshana, "Who is this warrior who has entered the battlefield? The light of the rising sun has been totally blocked by him and all places are engulfed in darkness. Our troops are running away in fear on seeing this gigantic figure. Who is he? Is it Rāvana in disguise come to threaten the army of vānaras? O Vibheeshana, please tell me." Vibheeshana replied, "My Lord, this is Rāvana's younger brother and my elder brother. Black-complexioned, he resembles Yama. He possesses a sharp trident and wears a hero's anklets. He is Kumbhakarna. *It is said that when Lord Tirumāl wakes up from His sleep all the Rākshasās die; but when Kumbhakarna rises from his slumber, the Devas die!* Kumbhakarna is accustomed to sleeping till the end of a yuga and is held in high esteem by his brother, Rāvana. Capable of consuming the life of even Yama, he has legs which can move faster than the wind. When Devendra was retreating (holding on to his mountain-like elephant Irāvatam), this Kumbhakarna, standing on the ground, simply seized and swung that elephant.

"Kumbhakarna can crush fire and wind and produce water from them. He would get into the sea and kick the water with such force that the fishes inside would perish. Mightiest of all, he has tremendous will-power. His great penances have given him lofty boons. This world is spared because he has been asleep all these days. He has a trident (given by Lord Siva) that consumed the living days of several heroes! Whenever they had challenged him in war, Kumbhakarna had only seen the backs of fleeing Devas and not their faces. *He advised Rāvana on more than two occasions that to seek another man's wife was against dharma and would cost us our lives. He chided him for refusing to release Seeta, and gave him sound advice. After explaining to Rāvana that imprisoning the wife of another was bad, and after finding that his words had no effect, Kumbhakarna has come today to face the Yama in you!"* As soon as Vibheeshana spoke thus, Sugreeva observed, "It is purposeless to kill Kumbhakarna. If possible, he must be persuaded to join us and relieve the agony of Vibheeshana." Rāma agreed and wanted to know who would go and plead with Kumbhakarna. Offering to go, Vibheeshana said, "With my intelligence, I will convince Kumbhakarna and bring him here if he consents." When Rāma approved, Vibheeshana crossed the

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sea of vānaras and reached the big army of the Rākshasās. His arrival was duly conveyed by the messengers to Kumbhakarna who attained boundless joy.

Vibheeshana paid obeisance to Kumbhakarna. With profuse tears in his eyes, Kumbhakarna embraced Vibheeshana and said, *"I was happy that you at least left us and were spared from destruction. Why have you thoughtlessly returned here, alone, destroying my pious wish? I was very pleased when I heard that you were granted refuge by Rāma. Thereby you have earned great wealth (which even the immortals cannot secure) in this and the next world. Why have you (who are greater than a poet) come now, to suffer hardship along with us who are 'happy' inside the mouth of Yama? Should you who ought to consume nectar, consume poison? Dear brother, the pride of our race is lost because of Rāvana's desire for another man's wife. However, I thought that through you (who joined Rāma) the lost pride of the descendants of Pulastya was redeemed, and I was happy thinking of your lofty shoulders. I am sad that you have now returned. Rāma, the protector of dharma will never desert you, especially when he has granted asylum to you. Because of the boons you have already secured, you have cast away the fear of death. By holding on to Rāma, you have got rid of the humiliation of being born a Rākshasa. When this is so, what prompted you now to come back here? You are fortunate to have surrendered before Rāma, the embodiment of dharma. Thereby, you have completely eliminated the three vices (fear, jealousy and ignorance) and got rid of everything that is bad, in this very life. You obtained, through Lord Brahma, the inherent quality of sticking to dharma. You acquired wisdom by performing great yāgas. Lord Brahma has blessed you with endless life. Still, you do not seem to have got rid of your inborn Rākshasa trait! Rāma, the universal God, and his brother, Lakshmana, are waiting with their arrows to kill me. Even Yama and our destiny are ready to kill our clan. You have come to us (who stand defeated) to destroy your own prowess! When we all die through Rāma's rain of arrows, show me who will be there to perform our last rites if you do not save yourself. The time for you to return to ancient Lanka is not now. When all the despicable Rākshasās are dead, you must enter Lanka along with Rāma (with Goddess Lakshmi in his bosom) and enjoy unique and boundless wealth. Go back forthwith."*

When Vibheeshana replied that he was bound by duty to say something, Kumbhakarna asked him to go ahead. Then, Vibheeshana said, "Rāma, who has granted asylum to an ignorant one like me, will grant shelter to you, too, if you join

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him. Rāma, a remedy for the disease of ceaseless births full of ignorance, will relieve you from the wheel of happiness and sorrow and grant you heavenly bliss. I will surrender to you the kingdom of Lanka granted to me by Rāma and will serve you for long. There can be nothing better than this for you. Please remove the mental agony of this younger brother and make our race prosper. You stood firm embracing justice and dharma. You cannot go back alive if you do not surrender to Rāma. Even if you escape, you cannot seek refuge anywhere and you will die. Why should you lose your life in vain? You must follow only the virtuous path enjoined in the scriptures. *One who follows dharma, will not spare even a beloved brother or parents, if they do wrong. As you are aware of this, what is there for me to explain? Those who are firm in their minds that filial bondage will only yield continuous agony, will not hesitate to give up their children, parents, wives, relatives and dear friends even if they had helped them. The only thing they will not give up will be dharma. Such self-denial will ensure them heavenly bliss. For one who has not taken part in another's sin, is it good or bad to be destroyed along with the latter? You are capable of analysing everything deeply. Is it not for upholding dharma that the great sage Parasurāma killed his mother?*

"Will anyone who is learned, indulge in deeds leading to inconceivable hell? *You are aware that any troublesome abscess in the body is removed by surgery and the malady is cured by flushing out the impure blood and thereafter by prompt medication. It ill behoves knowledgeable persons to waste perfumes by throwing them into the ocean.* I do not see any way to save your brother, Rāvana, from destruction. Nor is it possible to annul his misdeeds. You cannot achieve victory in this war and continue to live in this world. O lord, apart from sleeping and wasting your youthful life, have you achieved anything? You are going to give up dharma, lose your life for the sake of unscrupulous Rāvana and finally reach hell. Whereas, with the grace of Rāma, an incarnation of Lord Tirumāl, you will be redeemed from your endless sleep and be blessed with great wealth and long life as the sole monarch of this kingdom. This is the proper time for you to act. The head of the Trinity of Gods, Lord Tirumāl, has taken the form of Rāma. This Lord will give you the wealth of Lanka, which will make you second to none! Who can harm you then? If you keep away from Rāvana and follow the righteous path of the Devas and sages, you will attain eminence along with your children, my children, and also the children of Rāvana who has sought the destruction of all Rākshasās. Then the sages, too, will show their grace to you and you will have no enemies in the three worlds. *Is it wise to pluck mere flowers when ripe fruit are about to appear?* It is Rāma, (the Supreme Lord of the scriptures) himself, who out of

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his natural grace, his love for me and his compassion for you, sent me to plead with you thus. Do not give up dharma. Please leave Rāvana and come and see Rāma." With these words, Vibheeshana prostrated himself at Kumbhakarna's feet.

Wearing a garland of fragrant flowers, a lustrous crown and resounding anklets of gold on his feet, Kumbhakarna lifted the golden shoulders of sorrowful Vibheeshana and embraced him. *Shedding torrential, blood-like tears, Kumbhakarna told Vibheeshana, "My handsome son! My brother, Rāvana, looked after me exceedingly well all these days, and has now sent me to fight. For the sake of Rāvana, I will lay down my life. I will not go to Rāma for a life which is as ephemeral as a picture drawn on water. If you want to relieve me of my agony, return fast to that graceful dark-complexioned Rāma.* Because of the flawless boon granted to you by Lord Brahma, you sought imperishable dharma, and you will live as long as the world lasts. You are the leader of the entire world. *It befits you to be with Rāma. For me, dying 'discreditably' here will only bring fame.* If a thoughtless leader intends doing something wrong, it is good to try to prevent it and correct him. If this is impossible, what purpose is served in joining the enemy? It is the duty of one who has been fed by his leader, to fight on his behalf and lay down his life even before his leader's death. *My elder brother, Rāvana, who ruled the three worlds, is going to die by the scorching arrows of Rāma. Should my brother (watched by the Devas and others) fall on the earth and die in the midst of his withering army and relatives without me by his side?* When Rāvana's mighty shoulders which had lifted Mount Kailas, are bound by Yama's ropes, will not the enemies (who were hitherto afraid of him) ridicule him? *Dear Vibheeshana! I am not prepared to worship our enemy with folded hands just for the sake of protecting my life. Even if my heart is struck with arrows, will I (who had vanquished Yama) ever praise the enemy (who would kill my brother), imagining that the wealth of beautiful Lanka fortified by copper walls, is going to be everlasting?* You are certain to see for yourself that I will soon be conquering Hanuman, Angada, Sugreeva, Rāma and Lakshmana possessing golden bows, the unique Neelan, Jāmbavan and the vast army of monkeys who jump for fruits. You will see me moving like the sun going round the world removing the mist. You will also see the monkeys running away scared of me, like the Devas who ran away on seeing the Hālāhala poison. If Rāma and Lakshmana, looking like a black and a golden mountain, can come and stand before me, they are welcome as none other than these two are valiant enough to face me. I will destroy them and all others allowing none to move about in this world.

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"Great Vibheeshana, you command the regard of everyone! If you respect my words, go without delay. Seek the friendship of Rāma and Lakshmana. *Do not think you can change my mind with any more persuasion. Go and pray to Rāma who is the leader of the sages. With his sanction, and as per the Védas, perform the last rites of those Rākshasās killed in action and save them all from the agony of hell. O eternal one, what is bound to be destroyed will certainly be destroyed at the appointed time. Who is there who knows this truth better than you? Please leave this place without any remorse for me."* Kumbhakarna lifted Vibheeshana again, embraced him and shed torrential tears. *He gazed at his brother for a long while, and then said, "Our relationship as brothers ceases from today," and released him.* The victorious and mighty Vibheeshana fell at the feet of Kumbhakarna. Vibheeshana's eyes, face, mind and mouth became dry. His diamond-like body withered. He concluded that pleading any longer with Kumbhakarna was of no use. *After wading through the virtuous Kumbhakarna's vast army which bade him farewell with folded hands, Vibheeshana went back to Rāma. With his eyes becoming dry, and shedding tears of blood, Kumbhakarna stood in the battleground thinking of his brother Vibheeshana as one who had acquired the wisdom of elders after leaving the deceitful Rākshasās and giving up their inborn traits.* Reaching Rāma and bowing to him, Vibheeshana said, "Father, only those who can avert misdeeds will pursue the path of dharma. I pleaded with Kumbhakarna with all my eloquence. He would neither change his mind nor give up his attachment for his race." *Rāma, who resembled a graceful cloud, nodded his head gently and said, "I only felt it was unpleasant to strike down your brother in your very presence. What else can be done? Who can conquer destiny?"*

Soon, the roaring Rākshasa army surrounded the army of vānaras and commenced the battle. A great deal of dust arose encircling the three worlds. The sea was unable to cleanse itself of the dust that fell over it or raise its customary roar. In the battlefield, the horses and elephants ran, mighty chariots with wheels and rocks rolled, rivers of blood flowed and headless trunks danced. Even the fiends danced with the fond hope of getting food. Flags and vultures were seen moving in the sky. Rākshasās possessing sword-like teeth, along with the swords held in their hands, fell into the mire of brain, flesh, bones, blood and fat. The vānaras (with their golden shoulders) when attacked by the tridents and spears of the Rākshasās, plunged into the flood of blood. The Rākshasās shot arrows, while the vānara warriors threw rocks at them. The Rākshasās caught these rocks and threw them back at the vānaras, who caught them and crushed

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them. The Rākshasās abused the vānaras while the vānaras dragged them. The Devas were bewildered by these scenes in the battlefield. *The Rākshasās and the vānaras were like wind and water driving each other during a storm.* Caught in the midst of thick dust, the vānaras were killed and destroyed like the worlds getting caught in the grip of strong pralaya winds. These vānaras were also killed by being drowned in the sea of blood, by being trampled by elephants and by being crushed under the wheels of running chariots.

Kumbhakarna, looking at his blood-stained spear, entered the battlefield driving his chariot. *He caught hold of the vānaras, dashed some against rocks, hurled some to the ground, hit one against another and kicked some of them with his legs. He allowed a few of them to slip away and again caught them and crushed them under his feet. He swallowed some of the vānaras and spat them out. He twisted the heads of some and rubbed a few others on the ground. He threw some of them into the sky and kneaded a few into a paste which he smeared over his body. He drowned some of them in the sea, plunged a few into water allowing bubbles to come to the surface, threw some of them into fire, dashed some against chariots, scattered many of them in different directions and smashed some of them against mountains.* Frightened by the killing capabilities of Kumbhakarna, the Devas took to their heels. Vultures swarmed over the huge heaps of corpses which made mighty mountains look tiny. All the eight directions disappeared. The vānaras were slaughtered, making even Yama feel ashamed. The vānara warriors threw every available stone and tree at Kumbhakarna, shouting that the evil of Rākshasās was over and that victory was theirs. But Kumbhakarna met all the missiles easily with his two broad shoulders. He reduced the huge stones, roots, logs of wood and other objects thrown at him to powder. With nothing available for further attack, the vānaras ground their teeth in despair, fell on Kumbhakarna and lost their lives. *Like a cluster of birds falling over a mountain, some of the vānaras herded together and climbed over Kumbhakarna punching him hard with their hands. They bit him with their mighty teeth and tried to tear his body with their sharp nails which only got bent. Unable to do anything else, they came down and ran away.*

Like the wild wind lashing during pralaya, Neelan took out a rock from the earth and threw it at Kumbhakarna who reduced it to dust with his trident and smiled. Neelan felt that if he were to search for another rock, the vānaras might lose courage. He decided to use his own shoulders as weapons and jumped onto Kumbhakarna's

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chariot. Shouting loudly, Neelan raised his hands and punched Kumbhakarna and also kicked him several times. His hands having become weak, his legs unable to prop him up and his objective unfulfilled, Neelan became furious like fire fed with ghee. *Kumbhakarna gave him such a powerful blow with his left hand that Neelan struggled for his life. As Neelan was bare-handed, Kumbhakarna did not hurl his trident. Noticing Neelan's predicament, Angada dug out a big, strong mountain near by and threw it at Kumbhakarna, swearing aloud that Rāvana's brother would soon be dead.* Kumbhakarna easily bore this huge mountain on one of his shoulders and allowed it to fall scattered into countless pieces. While the vānara hordes became scared and ran away, Angada, with fury as his companion, stood firm! Kumbhakarna took a frightening diamond-club with a sharp edge, and hurled it at Angada to kill him. Angada caught it with one hand, swung it around, and swore that he would extract Kumbhakarna's life by hitting him with that very club. Emitting sparks of fire from his eyes, Angada jumped onto Kumbhakarna's big chariot, like lightning spreading fire over a mountain, and stood before him.

Looking at Angada with fiery eyes, Kumbhakarna asked him, "Who are you? Are you the leader, Sugreeva, awaiting your death at my hands or his son, Angada, or Hanuman who set fire to Lanka? Answer me quickly." Angada replied, "I am the son of valiant Vāli, who, with his tail, bound your elder brother Rāvana, leapt over the four directions, and paid homage to Lord Siva. I will tie you with my tail and carry you to the battleground where Rāma is standing and make you pray at his divine feet." Kumbhakarna said sarcastically, "People of this world will 'blame' you, if you do not show your 'animosity' by doing this 'noble' deed for one who 'helped' you by killing your father from a place of hiding! You shameless fellow! Flawless heroes will no doubt come in person and worship you! Know that you have not come here to tie me with your tail and drag me to Rāma. You have actually come here to get pierced by my trident, the tip of which will shortly come out of your back and look like another tail, while your hands and legs dangle lifeless." Angada became furious. Using the strength of his big handsome shoulder to swing the diamond-like club in his hand, he hit Kumbhakarna hard, like a thunderbolt hitting a mountain. No sooner did the club touch Kumbhakarna than it fell scattered into a hundred pieces like sparks of fire. Angada raised his hands and roared that he would kill the fearless Kumbhakarna. When Angada bent his arms to catch Kumbhakarna, the latter attacked him furiously forcing him to fall down and crack the ground.

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In the twinkling of an eye, Hanuman arrived on the scene. While Kumbhakarna was about to hurl a mighty sharp trident at Angada, Hanuman uprooted a mountain, threw it at Kumbhakarna's forehead and raised a loud noise after invoking Rāma's name. Removing the mountain which appeared like another head, and throwing it on the sturdy bosom of Hanuman, Kumbhakarna slapped his own shoulders with a roar. In the mean time the vānara warriors came forward fearlessly and carried Angada away. Digging up a long mountain, Hanuman told Kumbhakarna, "I will throw this at you, destroying your valour in no time. If you stop this mountain from harming you, the world will know of your prowess. I will then give up the fight and leave this place. Accept my challenge and earn great fame in this world." Listening to Hanuman, Kumbhakarna laughed aloud opening his huge cavernous mouth which resembled that of Yama and said, "Even if I suffer from the slightest fatigue while shouldering the mountain thrown by you, I accept defeat and concede that my strength is inferior to yours." Hanuman retorted, "Tarry, if you have the might to bear the mountain; or else leave this place and save your life." Hanuman hurled the mountain at Kumbhakarna who bore it on his shoulders and broke it into a hundred pieces, terrifying all the worlds. *Hanuman thought, "The incomprehensible might of Kumbhakarna cannot be destroyed even by the mountains in the eight regions. If at all he can be killed, it can only be by Rāma's arrows!" Hanuman then left the place.*

The Devas were concerned that the entire vānara army would fall prey to Kumbhakarna's trident. They trembled to think that soon the three worlds would get destabilised. The hands of the vānaras that attacked Kumbhakarna could only become tired. None of them could shake him even a bit. Trouncing the entire vānara army, Kumbhakarna once again established his prowess. A terror even to Yama, he shouted repeatedly, "Where have these two ascetics Rāma and Lakshmana gone?" Countless big vānaras were killed and the surviving ones ran helter-skelter. The whole battlefield looked deserted. *Innumerable corpses fell into the sea because of which it rose high as on seeing the full moon.* The Devas expressed concern that the mountains, rocks and trees were reduced in number with half of the vānaras killed. However, they became happy when they saw Lakshmana, the leonine son of Sumitra, appearing before Kumbhakarna and attacking him. Lakshmana twanged his bow. There was a deafening sound in all directions as though lightning had struck the earth. On hearing this frightening sound, many Rākshasās lost their lives, and their wives threw their golden māngalyams on the ground. The fiends threw away the pieces of meat they were eating and danced in ecstasy. A series of deadly arrows were shot with great force

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and speed from Lakshmana's bow. Spitting fire all the way, these arrows pierced the elephants in the eight directions and sucked their blood. Some of the arrows shot by Lakshmana sliced the necks of the cruel Rākshasās, carrying them beyond the battlefield. Such arrows looked as if they had heads. Some arrows looking like the sun, pierced the mountain-like elephants and trees and snatched even the heads of Rākshasās who were outside the battlefield. Finally these arrows disappeared into the mountains like snakes entering their holes.

The arrows shot by Lakshmana looked like lightning. With sharp golden tips, they attacked the faces of the front row of warriors as well as the necks of the hind ones with uniform speed. *The arrows shot by Lakshmana spread everywhere and entered the eyes of leather drums, the mouths of bugles, the hands holding them, the necks of elephants, the chariots drawn by horses, the heads of horses, and the eyes of all those who watched this. Attacked by Lakshmana's arrows, elephants lost their tusks, tails, ears, eyes which spat fire, long trunks and forefeet with which they had stepped into the battlefield.* Such elephants which lost all their limbs tumbled on the ground like mountain-peaks! Galloping horses were attacked without any respite by the continuous flow of arrows from Lakshmana's bow and fell down unconscious. Big chariots with flags flying on them were deprived of their horses, leaders and charioteers, as they were all slain by Lakshmana's arrows. The chariots, which could no longer move on their own, were dragged by the currents of the copious flow of blood that flooded the battlefield. *Lakshmana's arrows were as infallible as destiny.* The heads severed by them, fell down with wide open mouths, and floated like pots in the flood of blood.

The fierce arrows shot by Lakshmana attacked the foreheads of elephants. As a result, these were no longer controlled by the elephant-goads. With wounded trunks they stormed into the vānara ranks. The series of weapons hurled by the grotesque Rākshasās flew in all directions shedding sparks of fire, but they were intercepted by Lakshmana's arrows and fell on the ground like stars from the sky. His long and sharp arrows pierced the hooves of the galloping horses, made the cavalry retreat, destroyed the pride of their victorious flags, and annihilated the cluster of golden chariots. Even though the Rākshasās were without compassion and dharma, they fought gloriously and died in the battlefield. When they reached the heroes' heaven, the celestial dancers embraced them willingly, establishing the truth that a hero's death wipes out all sins. *Lakshmana's arrows appeared to be 'begging' for various limbs. These arrows snatched*

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the hands of some, the heads of a few, the legs of some, the shoulders of some, and various other limbs of others, and finally became 'poorer' for want of any more enemies. Like a few poets who compose soothing poems of varying degrees (depending upon the quantum of riches bestowed upon them), Lakshmana's arrows seized the noses of some, and the eyes of a few, besides snatching the hands, ears and feet of the rest. Like a flood of blood, the Rākshasās ran in groups in all directions fearing that if they stood in the battlefield any longer, they would be slain by the arrows shot by Lakshmana, the very life of dharma. Watching the unique valour of Lakshmana and the mass of Rākshasās killed by him in the battlefield, Kumbhakarna, the great descendant of Pulastya, declared a thousand times, *"Lord Siva who burnt the three citadels and this Lakshmana are the only two exceptional archers I have seen."*

Roaring like a lion, the valiant Kumbhakarna approached Lakshmana in a long, wide, golden chariot resembling the Meru. Driven by a charioteer in all directions, faster than the wind and mind, Kumbhakarna with his curved white teeth, standing on the lustrous big chariot, began a fierce battle. Feeling that it would not be proper for Lakshmana to stand on the ground and oppose Kumbhakarna, Hanuman requested him to get onto his shoulders and fight. With the blessings of the Devas, leonine Lakshmana sat on the mighty shoulders of Hanuman. The vānara army raised a din extolling Lakshmana. The shoulders of Hanuman became wider than six chariots drawn together by a thousand horses. *Lustrous Lakshmana seated on the shoulders of incomparable Hanuman, was like the golden Meru seated on the silvery Mount Kailas.* Kumbhakarna, who came to the battlefield to fight Lakshmana with a quiver stocked with innumerable arrows, bent a sturdy bow which put to shame even the rainbow. *He told Lakshmana, "You are the younger brother of Rāma, and I of Rāvana. We are now to fight each other. The Devas have assembled to witness this. Let us display our fight in the laudable ancient classical style, befitting our prowess.*

"By virtue of our penance, we were blessed with a flawless, creeper-like sister, namely Soorpanakha. You are the victorious 'hero' who severed her nose in great anger! I will now sever the hand, which dragged her by the hair, and throw it on the ground. Try, if you can, to protect yourself." Replying to Kumbhakarna who resembled the darkness of night, Lakshmana, the possessor of mighty shoulders trimmed by constant wrestling said, *"I have been taught not to reply with words, but with my bow."* Kumbhakarna became furious. With his eyes flashing fire, he shot eighteen arrows simultaneously. The Devas were frightened and exclaimed that the sky, the

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earth and the mountains would soon be broken in two. The eighteen arrows shot by Kumbhakarna were destroyed by four of Lakshmana's. Kumbhakarna immediately shot an arrow (presented by Brahma) which had a lustrous tip, a thousand faces and had tormented the Devas. He challenged Lakshmana to break the same if he had the courage. Watching the fiery nature of Kumbhakarna's arrow, which burned everything as it proceeded, Lakshmana replied with a divine arrow and annihilated Kumbhakarna's dart. The cruel Kumbhakarna instantly shot twelve fiery arrows at Hanuman, two arrows at Lakshmana, and hundreds of other arrows which screened the very sky and the eight regions. Lakshmana destroyed all of them with suitable arrows. He also sliced the wild elephants, horses, yālis and big demons (drawing the chariot) and finally smashed Kumbhakarna's chariot and killed his charioteers. Like the dissolution of a huge rainbow inside dark clouds, Kumbhakarna's mighty bow was destroyed by Lakshmana! *Witnessing the fierce battle waged by him, the Devas wondered whether the havoc was caused by Lakshmana's fierce attack or by his mantras and curses!*

Kumbhakarna who had lost his chariot and his bow, became furious and swore that he would consume Lakshmana's life. He then took out a lustrous three-headed trident, a Yama-like fierce weapon that had defeated the three worlds earlier. With great anger, he jumped down with force like flood-water flowing towards a pond and stood on the ground, which looked as though it would break in two. Seeing Kumbhakarna on the ground, Lakshmana felt he would be blamed if he were to fight seated on Hanuman. So he, too, jumped down from Hanuman's broad shoulders. *Rāvana, who saw this, sent twice as many troops as had died in the battlefield, to help Kumbhakarna.* Roaring like the sea, these troops surrounded the leonine Lakshmana. The vānaras became panic-stricken and ran amuck knocking each other down. Lakshmana destroyed the weapons that were shot at him from all directions and finally entered into the centre of the enemy army which looked like a fine black sea. *The Rākshasās' black heads with red hair severed by Lakshmana's arrows, were found heaped together a little away from the battlefield, appearing like a dam constructed with mountains of heads to prevent the flow of the river of blood. The trunks of elephants, the legs of horses, the wheels of chariots which moved with the speed of wind and the heads of Rākshasās, were floating in pools of blood everywhere. Struck by Lakshmana's arrows, all the weapons hurled by the enemies fell, shattered into innumerable pieces.* Even their ornaments like ear-rings, bracelets, crowns, garlands, gem-set chains, anklets, and shoulder-shields were strewn on the ground. White umbrellas, white chowries, lofty

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big flags, bows, shields, arrows and umbrellas with peacock feathers which were washed away by the river of blood were retrieved and thrown on the 'banks' by groups of demons!

As fierce fighting raged in the battlefield, Kumbhakarna with his long, white, grinding teeth, moved in another direction and fought fiercely with Sugreeva. Feeling that this was worth watching, the Devas assembled in large numbers. Emitting sparks of fire and smoke from his eyes and mouth, Sugreeva dug up a mighty mountain and threw it at Kumbhakarna, making the onlookers declare that his strong shoulders would be smashed. Kumbhakarna of boundless strength held this big mountain on the palm of his hand, ridiculed Sugreeva, pulverised it, and threw the powder on the ground. Watching this, the Devas were frightened. *While Sugreeva was in search of another big mountain, Kumbhakarna hurled a trident (which was as unerring as the curse of one with flawless penance to his credit) at him.* Those who watched this, said that Sugreeva's life would end with that. Suddenly Hanuman leapt, caught the trident, broke it and threw it down! *How could Hanuman, the protector of dharma, afford to remain idle allowing the trident to attack Sugreeva? The resultant thunderous noise resembled the great sound that emanated when Rāma broke Lord Siva's bow. Seeing Hanuman's prowess, Kumbhakarna lauded him and said, "The might of your hands is beyond description. In all the lands, you alone are capable of performing this extraordinary feat. Is there anything to compare with this unique valour?" Kumbhakarna invited Hanuman to fight with him in any manner he wanted. Hanuman said, "It is wrong to fight with you, after I declared I would no longer do so," and left the place.*

After losing the trident, Kumbhakarna stood still without any weapon. Suddenly Sugreeva leapt on him and punched him with his fists. With blood-shot eyes appearing like melted copper, Kumbhakarna scoffed at Sugreeva and warned him that his pride would end that day. Preventing Sugreeva from escaping, Kumbhakarna held him in his grip. Grappling with each other, both of them moved to the right and left so rapidly, that the Devas could not see them clearly. Engulfed in smoke, blood oozed from their mouths. Still, they were not tired. Shouting at each other, they fought relentlessly. Finally, with all his might, Kumbhakarna tightened his grip on Sugreeva. Unable to bear it, Sugreeva partially lost his senses. Kumbhakarna felt that if he took Sugreeva away to Lanka, the war would come to an end on that very day and the large army of vānaras would be scattered without a king. Accordingly, he carried Sugreeva

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on his shoulders and proceeded towards Lanka. Watching this, the monkeys became desperate. They beat their breasts with their hands, and wept bitterly like fledgelings crying aloud on seeing the mother bird being carried away by a vulture. While the Rākshasās rejoiced, the Devas trembled. The commanders of the vānaras appeared lifeless with weak hearts and shrunken eyes. Furious Kumbhakarna looked like a reptile mercilessly devouring its victim. Sugreeva appeared lean and weak like the moon about to be swallowed by Rāhu. *Sugreeva, the son of Soorya who sheds light in all the eight regions, was now hidden inside the cloud-like, cruel, black body of Kumbhakarna. He was visible a little sometimes, and a little more at other times, like the moon in the sky, hidden by the clouds at times and coming out of the clouds at times.* Though his king was being carried away, Hanuman, remembering his vow not to fight Kumbhakarna, did not oppose him. Wringing his hands, he simply followed Kumbhakarna.

Prostrating themselves at the divine feet of Rāma of the thousand names, the monkeys shouted that Sugreeva was being carried away by Kumbhakarna, and wanted to know who would be their king henceforth. Rāma's eyes became more furious than fire. Bow in hand, Rāma reached the gateway of Lanka in no time. He feared that there would be great havoc if Sugreeva was allowed to be taken away by Kumbhakarna into the impregnable city of Lanka. Swearing that he would block the entire passage in the sky, Rāma accomplished the task with a rain of mighty arrows. All the regions became invisible. The rays of the sun lost their brightness. Even the black clouds disappeared from the sky. Cruel fierce Kumbhakarna, moving faster than the mind, reached the wall of arrows in the sky. Realising that it was hard to remove these arrows, Kumbhakarna looked back. He saw Rāma with his 'lotuses' (face, mouth, eyes, hands and legs), resembling a lake blooming with lotus flowers! He became livid, looking at Rāma who had come down to earth like a cloud! His mouth emitted dense smoke and his lips trembled. His eyebrows went up. His eyes flashed fire. He roared, causing rocks to crumble and fall. He told Rāma sarcastically, "Taking me to be like that weak Vāli who plucked and ate flowers, or like the big Kavandha, you have come to attack me to save Sugreeva. *Let me tell you that I was neither angry with your brother, Lakshmana, in the battlefield, nor with Hanuman who acted as his 'chariot' nor with your friend, Sugreeva, the younger brother of Vāli, because anger directed at them cannot bring credit to me. I moved in the battlefield only in search of you.* Your army could not face me. It ran away beyond the eight regions. Your brother lost his valour and sneaked away. Hanuman was deprived of his might. Finally I am carrying away

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this Sugreeva who has lost his strength. If you have come here to fight with me and retrieve Sugreeva, it is my good fortune. I shall show you, the various methods of warfare that I had used earlier. By killing you, I shall try to wipe out the malady of lust that afflicts my brother, Rāvana. O great warrior with weapons! *If you have the unique prowess to release Sugreeva with the help of your bow, in the presence of the Devas, you can consider Seeta also to have been released from her captivity."*

With a smile, Rāma told Kumbhakarna, "If I fail to sever your mountainous shoulders which lifted my dear Sugreeva, you can consider me defeated. Thereafter, I shall not touch the bow." As Kumbhakarna was trying to remove Rāma's wall of arrows, Rāma took two arrows, as sharp as a sharp-tipped shining sword, from his quiver, shot them from his bow, and pierced Kumbhakarna's wide forehead. Soon blood filled his forehead, making it appear like the rising sun, and oozed profusely like a stream of water falling from a mountain. It flowed onto the face of Sugreeva lying unconscious on Kumbhakarna's shoulders. As a result, Sugreeva regained consciousness. He rose as if he had woken up from his sleep. Kumbhakarna who had not lost his might till then, became giddy. *Sugreeva who regained his senses realised that the objects that were glittering on Kumbhakarna's face were only Rāma's arrows.* On seeing Rāma, Sugreeva paid obeisance to him and extolled him. Sugreeva also felt ashamed of himself. Suddenly, he bit and took away Kumbhakarna's nose and ears and reached his camp. As soon as Sugreeva returned, the vānaras, the scriptures, the celestial women, the sages, the sea, the mountains and dharma joined hands with the Devas and rejoiced. *On Seeing Sugreeva, freed from the clutches of the furious Kumbhakarna, Rāma was relieved of his agony and became immensely happy as if Seeta herself had returned from her harsh prison in Lanka.*

Sugreeva was able to bite off the nose and ears of Kumbhakarna and return, only because Rāma's arrows had pierced Kumbhakarna's forehead and had made him weak from profuse bleeding. After regaining his senses, Kumbhakarna who was covered with blood realised that the king of the vānaras had slipped from his hands with his precious nose and ears. Kumbhakarna, from whose forehead blood flowed like a river, resembled a big red mountain from which torrential rain gushed creating cool weather. *He who could always think deeply and act, could not comprehend a situation like this.* Because of Rāvana's great crime of abducting Seeta, he had to suffer the ignominy of losing his ears and nose. His eyes bloodshot, Kumbhakarna was boiling with rage at his great humiliation. *He would look at the abusing Devas. He*

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would look at his fate and would look at the earth. He thought that it would be better if he saw the face of Rāma before the latter saw his. He held the scorching, lustrous, mighty sword (usually carried and handed over to him by two thousand demons) in his right hand, and in his left hand, the mighty shield, so big that it had to be carried to him by a thousand Rākshasās! With a gigantic physique resembling the Meru encircled by the sun with a thousand rays, he shook his shield and waved it. As a result the earth trembled. The air that was generated carried panic-stricken hordes of monkeys with it, and scattered them around. Many fell into the roaring sea and formed themselves into a raised mound on which some of the monkeys ran. Kumbhakarna speedily attacked everyone with his shield, crushed the monkeys with his legs and threw deadly spears with great force. The army of monkeys got scattered like the waves of the sea affected by a storm. *The act of throwing weapons, the destruction of enemies who came in their path, the consequent flow of rivers of blood, and the heads of Ādisesha being smeared with mire, all happened within a moment.*

Jāmbavan approached Rāma and told him that if Kumbhakarna was not stopped, he might reduce the strength of the vānara army and increase that of the Rākshasās. The Supreme Lord Rāma, too, watched the gradual destruction of the army of monkeys and the growing might of the Rākshasās. *He decided that he would make Yama stand before Kumbhakarna.* Marching forward, he shot thirteen speedy arrows which appeared like thunder. Kumbhakarna, a master in warfare, simply shook them like an eagle shaking its feathers. The arrows were all reduced to powder and were scattered in the sky. When Rāma again shot sharp arrows as fierce as the summer sun, Kumbhakarna met them with his shield. The arrows were either cut into pieces or bent, and all of them fell down. Rāma with his eyes red, gave a gentle smile and shot another small but sharp arrow which broke Kumbhakarna's sword into smithereens like Garuda cutting a cobra into bits. This caused jubilation among the Devas. Kumbhakarna heaved an angry sigh that could extinguish even the submarine fire. Suddenly, handling another diamond-like sword and shouting that he would annihilate everyone, Kumbhakarna came to the forefront of the battlefield. But Rāma destroyed this sword as well as his golden shield and shot lightning-like arrows at the stone-like armour covering Kumbhakarna's chest. *Destabilising Devendra and others who were watching, a big contingent of the Rākshasa army sent by Rāvana arrived to assist Kumbhakarna. Rāma the great archer felt that the time had come to finish Kumbhakarna. Rāma's decision was like the arrival of virtue to eliminate omnipresent vice.* Kumbhakarna was protected on all four sides by armies of infantry, cavalry,

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chariots and rutting elephants. On seeing them, the elusive Rāma heartily welcomed them. He stood before the huge armies which looked as if fourteen crores of seas had arrived together! *Kumbhakarna was seen with a fierce trident with three leaves, which appeared to represent time, Yama, and immeasurable harm. The trident was capable of swallowing and destroying heaven, the earth and the nether world.*

Owing to the fierce onslaught by Rāma, severed heads and headless trunks were seen lying like blocks of wood and heaps of rocks. Rāma's arrows destroyed all the weapons of the Rākshasās. Some of the broken weapons fell on the battleground in a heap. Some of the weapons were carried away by the flood of blood. Some were cut into pieces and filled the battlefield. Some were reduced to powder, shedding sparks of fire while many of the weapons were sliced into hundreds of pieces and were scattered everywhere. Rāma's arrows pierced the wide foreheads of elephants who fled throwing off their mahouts. The blood oozing from their bodies stagnated on the earth. They lost their tusks and their bowels were badly torn. The Devas who saw this could not spot a single rutting live elephant anywhere in the battlefield. They could not see a single chariot in good repair. All the beautiful horses lost their might, had their curved necks severed, and lost their vocal cords. Such dead horses were carried by the current of the river of blood along with heaps of carcasses of fearless wild elephants. The Devas could only see the moving of these rivers but not a single live, galloping horse. *It is needless to emphasise the speed and efficiency of Rāma's fierce arrows by citing more such instances.* Suffice it to say that the Devas could see all the Rākshasās who had come to wage war only in the heroes' heaven. Not one of them even with a mountain-like physique could be seen alive on that battleground. *The Devas, however, could see a crowd of Rākshasis in the battlefield searching for their beloved husbands who died fighting!*

The Rākshasa army was annihilated by Rāma like the disappearance of dew after the arrival of the sun. While the Devas became pleased, the Rākshasās who were happy earlier, became concerned that Kumbhakarna who had never known defeat was now certain to die. *Rāma took pity on him as he was left alone.* Looking at his face, Rāma said, "Along with all your weapons, you have lost your mighty army. Now, you stand before me all alone. *You are born along with Vibheeshana, the just. Therefore, I am giving you back your life. You may now return to your palace or come to my side or fight with me again and die.* Because your sins are not yet over, you did not join me when I invited you through your brother, Vibheeshana. You thereby forfeited a

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long life and secure wealth. *You stand before me preparing yourself for a deep and endless slumber (death). Tell me what is in your mind."* Kumbhakarna replied, "Let me first tell you that because of your unique distinction of achieving victory with unabated heroism, and the inherent justice and dharma in your ancestry, *I have lost my nose and ears like my sister, Soorpanakha.* I would not like to live, showing such a mutilated face to the world. O perennial one, the Devas no longer look at us with fear. *I tried to protect divine Seeta from harm, warning my brother that she was another man's wife. I am miserable because my words fell on deaf ears. Can I now return to the city of Lanka, after having lost my ears and nose? I had come here only to sever your head and shoulders with my sword, suck the enemy lives, and please my brother by offering him the beautiful Seeta!* Will I fall before my brother, Rāvana, holding my head with my red hands, mixing tears with blood, weeping and shouting like my sister, Soorpanakha, and make the Devas laugh at me? You are the Supreme Lord of the three worlds and a warrior of repute, capable of analysing blameworthy acts. But you talk like one who has not realised the duties of a warrior. *If your heads are severed with a sharp sword, will an attempt made to fix them again succeed?"*

Kumbhakarna then transferred his long trident, from his right hand to the left one. He took out a mighty mountain with his right hand as though he was pulling out the bowels of the earth. Moving into the sky with sparks of fire, he threw the mountain (wishing it success) at Rāma's head. *Rāma's arrows made the thunder-like mountain look like the sacred ash adorning Lord Siva's forehead and broke Kumbhakarna's long trident.* Rāma's fast, unfailing, lustrous and fierce arrows capable of drying up the tidal sea, and reaching the sky after piercing the Meru mountain, were, however, unable to pierce Kumbhakarna's armour. Realising that the armour was presented by Lord Siva, Rāma shot an arrow invoking the blessings of that Lord. The shining armour split open and fell, looking like the sun around the Meru. Kumbhakarna became furious. Emitting fire from his eyes and raising a clamour, he took up a long, big, sturdy, spiked mace. Declaring that he would grind the army of monkeys into a paste, he began smashing them.

Among the arrows shot by Rāma, a thousand flew into the sky, a thousand entered the enemies' bodies, a thousand tore the enemies' graceful chests, a thousand moved in different directions, a thousand arrows disappeared, and another thousand proceeded towards each and every target! Still Kumbhakarna moved like a kite with his mace. Rāma felt that if he was allowed to wield his mace,

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the vānara army would be wiped out. The cloud-like Rāma shot ten sharp arrows simultaneously and broke Kumbhakarna's mace into pieces. Furious Kumbhakarna took up a sword and a golden shield (shining like the sun) making the nervous vānara warriors run in different directions. The Devas hung their heads down instead of looking straight. The monkeys shouted that the massacre had started again. On hearing this, the victorious Rāma shot a powerful arrow commanding it to sever one of the mountain-like shoulders of Kumbhakarna. *The arrow cut off his right arm along with the sword held by it. While the severed arm was like the rising wave in the boiling black pralaya sea, the sword resembled the moon in the sky covered by the serpent Rāhu. Thus vice was in grief, while virtue rejoiced.* Sweating profusely, the terribly agitated Rākshasās ran away frightened, shouting aloud that Lanka and Rāvana were in peril.

Kumbhakarna took the mighty severed arm that had fallen on the ground in his left hand, and rushed towards his enemies. With a roar he attacked them, using the severed arm as a weapon. The monkeys ran away frightened and lost their lives in hordes. Only the few, who begged for mercy could survive. Even as Rāma was protecting the army of monkeys, Kumbhakarna was engaged in their massacre, killing thrice the number that were slain earlier and feasting Yama! The whole army of monkeys was in agony, fearing that all of them would be wiped out. *Everyone appeared to be more afraid of Kumbhakarna's severed right arm than the left that was intact.* While the vast vānara army ran away, the blood oozing from Kumbhakarna's torn shoulder flowed like a big river carrying corpses. The frightened Devas ran helter-skelter and the people of Lanka along with its animals and birds sped in several directions. Chasing away the clouds, Kumbhakarna went through the air and ran towards Rāma. The Devas prayed to Rāma to immediately sever Kumbhakarna's other arm. Rāma the great king, shot a deadly arrow at Kumbhakarna and removed the fear of Yama who had so far not faced Kumbhakarna. The arrow severed Kumbhakarna's left arm and threw it into the ocean to serve as a dam. *The golden-feathered, sharp and speedy arrow which obeyed Rāma, resembled Garuda the king of eagles, while Kumbhakarna's severed arm in the sea, resembled the Mandara mountain in the ocean of milk.*

Kumbhakarna, a Rākshasa form of the five elements, blustering aloud even after his flesh, skin and bones had mingled with blood, churned the sea of monkeys with his legs. A fearless king among the arrogant, Kumbhakarna had the fury of Yama.

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Rāma the great archer severed his right leg with a sharp and fierce arrow. Kumbhakarna's front teeth resembled a cluster of stars, while his frightening side teeth looked like shining crescent moons. In the red sky created by the river of blood, Kumbhakarna with his mouth wide open, as if dusk had set in, hopped on his solitary leg making huge craters in the earth into which the sea water flowed. Kumbhakarna stood up touching the sky. Biting everything around him, he fought moving like a whirlwind. Rāma invoked Agni and shot an arrow at the other leg of Kumbhakarna. To the joy of dharma and the Védas, the arrow severed this leg, too, and lightened earth's load. With his two arms and two legs gone, two lakhs of arrows pierced Kumbhakarna's mountain-like trunk, entered his body, and left through his back. The sparks of fire that flashed from his red eyes increased twofold and his wrath grew greater than the thunder from dark clouds. Biting off a yōjana-long mountain, Kumbhakarna blew it towards the army of monkeys. As if attacked by lightning, the monkeys dropped dead. *With fury in his eyes, Kumbhakarna heaved a deep sigh which produced flames and burnt all the regions. He bit off another mountain with bamboo trees, and blew it out, scorching the battlefield and making the demons roar. Seeing the heroic deeds of Kumbhakarna, even Rāma stood with his lotus hands trembling.*

Kumbhakarna, however, was very sad. He thought, "Even one thousand Rāvanas cannot equal Rāma's archery which has deprived me of my arms and legs. There are no more limbs to help me to fight. What can I do now? Death is at my doorstep because of Rāvana's lust for Seeta. Rāvana, who could have lived eternally, has no way now of retaining his life." Meru-like Kumbhakarna saw red blood flowing like fast rivers in different directions dragging in their current mechanically operated chariots, and elephants, horses and infantry. *He looked at Rāma and said, "O descendant of the noble race of Emperor Sibi! You have a few duties cast on you. Though you will destroy us totally, please protect the life of Vibheeshana. By joining you, he has emancipated himself from the sin of being born amongst us. O Supreme Lord and the embodiment of the scriptures in the form of a king! My brother Vibheeshana knows only dharma that flows from justice. He does not know vices that flow from injustice. I pray you to grant him the refuge he has sought from you. Fearing that he will be destroyed by Vibheeshana, Rāvana has a grudge against him. Rāvana (unaware of the meaning of fraternal love) will kill him with fury if he can. Therefore, please protect Vibheeshana with care. Rāvana possesses no virtue. He will not show mercy to him nor allow him to live. Keep him with you in the company of your brother, Lakshmana, and Hanuman without separating him from them.* The Devas and sages who are our enemies will

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look at my noseless face with contempt. Please prevent them from seeing it, b severing my head and hiding it in the black sea. These are my prayers to you."

Rāma felt it was not proper to reject the 'boons' sought by Kumbhakarna Twanging his mighty bow, he shot an arrow which plucked the head of Kumbhakarna Invoking the name of Vāyu, Rāma dispatched the head into the depths of the dark se with another arrow. Kumbhakarna's face resembled a rock. Smoke came out of his tw eyes, and also from Rāma's arrow. *Instead of being dragged in all four directions b the waves of the wide sea, Kumbhakarna's head plunged deep into it and the sea wate seeped through the severed nose.* The Devas celebrated the death of Kumbhakarna dancing to sweet music rendered by celestial women. The sages and the ascetics were relieved of their fear. The vānara commanders surrounded the victorious Rāma. The mighty Rākshasās were frightened to the core. They ran to Rāvana to convey the news of Kumbhakarna's death.

16. THE MĀYA JANAKA

Let us narrate the unique and deceptive methods employed by Rāvana prompted by his lust for Seeta. Coming to the council hall, Rāvana looked at Mahōdaran and said, "Tell me how I can secure Seeta, get rid of my grief, and restore my life." Mahōdaran replied, "I will suggest a plan which will make Seeta voluntarily come to you. Maruttan, the Rākshasa, should immediately assume the form of Janaka, the father of Seeta, and be taken before her. *For the sake of releasing him, Seeta will agree to marry you."* Acclaiming the plan, Rāvana embraced Mahōdaran and wanted it to be implemented at once. Soon Mahōdaran left for the Asōka grove to threaten Seeta who had conquered *evil* by her chastity! With his bright crowns shedding lustre like the morning sun, with shining ornaments adorning his shoulders, and his golden chain looking like a waterfall coming down from the blue mountain, Rāvana walked towards the Asōka grove with majestic steps, which put to shame even elephants. Along with celestial damsels (possessing foreheads like the crescent moon) who walked (like lamps carrying lamps) with shining jewels as girdles and breasts that caused distress to their slender waists, Rāvana arrived. *There, he saw the beautiful Seeta (the sum total of countless noble qualities) who would soon be thrown into confusion.*

Endowed with sturdy shoulders which had chased the Devas from their abodes, Rāvana sat on a golden throne, with the circular royal umbrella spread over him, with white chowries fanning him on either side and with a sword tucked in his waist.

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Disclosing his lustful anguish, Rāvana asked Seeta, "When will you show mercy to this slave? When am I to realise the difference between the hot sun and the cool moon? When will I escape from Manmatha's arrows? Deceiving myself, I wanted to swallow nectar mixed with poison in the form of a woman. My heart which was languishing every day without you has become normal only now, after seeing you. I was afraid I would die if I stopped thinking of you. *Like a slave, I surrender to you born along with the nectar of immortality. You have defeated the invincible Rāvana.* You have made my body burn even in the moonlight despite the gentle southern breeze. My sturdy diamond-like shoulders have now become thin. You have made me know what suffering is, and made the Devas scorn my might. I do not know what further wounds you will inflict on me before destroying me! All my women and all my love can be found only in you. All my eyes are only your eyes. You have made Manmatha shoot his five flowery arrows wounding me severely. If I (the ruler of the three worlds who terrify the celestials, humans and Lord Siva) am to be killed by the sickness of 'love', will it not cast a slur on my masculinity? *O golden damsel!* Affected by the malady of lust, my withering life has become a cur's life. Knowledgeable ones say, suffering from lust gives rise to ten types of agonies. But I know that they give rise to more than a thousand. *O wealth born of dharma!* You are sweeter than nectar. I am as good as not born, as I am unable to attain you. Your exceptional beauty has destroyed my self esteem, and the fame of my past deeds. If I attain you, I will retrieve my lost honour and fame. It is this thought that brings me back to life from the daily deaths I die! Who can understand this? O Seeta, analyse the episode of Ahalya dispassionately. Though she accepted the advances made to her by Devendra, did she attract any blemish? There is no remedy other than the nectar coming from your lotus mouth that can cure my sickness born of desire."

Rāvana got up from his throne, went up to Seeta, prostrated himself before her with his sturdy shoulders touching the earth, and allowed his crowns (which flashed like lightning) to lie on the ground for a long time! The slender Seeta trembled like a deer facing a tiger and sobbed. Even at the risk of Rāvana killing her, she wanted to tell him what was in her mind. Looking at a blade of grass lying on the ground, she said, "Your sinful lust for me will only earn reproof for you in this birth, and drive you to hell in the next one. The words that you have uttered ought not to have been addressed to another man's wife. You have forsaken dharma. Your heart should have been ripped long ago, and you should have been destroyed with your wicked kin. Neither of these has happened. Do my chastity and dharma mean nothing? Do they have no power? *For uttering despicable words you possess ten mouths.* As long as

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there is one like me still alive to hear these unchaste words, what will you not talk or do? You boast that you have vanquished even Devendra, Lord Brahma, Lord Muruga, Lord Siva and Lord Tirumāl. Perhaps out of fear, you have not entered the battlefield and faced my beloved, my husband! I would rather starve and die than live in dishonour! You know that only the hope that I will meet my virtuous and noble Lord Rāma keeps me alive. It is my ardent wish that in the battlefield when you show your back and run, my Meru-like brother Lakshmana should stop you, and Rāma should sever your heads, and achieve resounding victory over the Rākshasās. *The desire to witness this spectacle, alone detains my life which frequently threatens to depart! Realise that I have no life other than the life of Rāma who has mercy as his life, who has eyes resembling the lotus, who holds a bow, who has the complexion of a dark cloud and who is pleasant to all."*

Sparks came out of Rāvana's eyes. He felt that Seeta had attempted to kill him. He became as ferocious as Yama. With a thunderous laugh he said, "Do you think that Rāma will defeat me and redeem you, and you will live together as one? Has anyone in this world escaped my wrath? Even if you conceal Rāma in your heart imagining him to be Lord Tirumāl, I will most certainly kill him. Do not be carried away by the roars and achievements of the monkeys who helped Rāma to build a Sétu. They are all like insects falling before a lamp. I have sent armed Rākshasās to Ayōdhya, with instructions to capture all the kith and kin of Emperor Dasaratha and bring them here either alive or with their heads severed. I have also dispatched my army to your father, Janaka, with similar instructions." *On hearing Rāvana's words, Seeta became frightened. She felt that when he could through his deception take her captive, nothing was impossible for him.* Repeatedly heaving sighs, she evinced great anxiety. She became an abode of agony as if she was constantly consuming fire and spitting it out. Shedding copious tears, dejected Seeta felt, "Will not the cruel fate that separated me from Rāma also have the strength to carry out Rāvana's threat in Ayōdhya and Mithila? All things which were considered vices in the past seem to be virtues now!" *Just then, Mahōdaran came there with Maruttan who had taken the form of Janaka, the father of Seeta.*

The false Janaka was heard weeping aloud. He was dragged by Mahōdaran before fiery Rāvana to whom he bowed. Unable to bear this sight, Seeta was like a fledgeling watching its mother fall into a fire. Unaware that the 'Janaka' whom she saw was a false one, Seeta wrung her hands and rubbed her eyes. She shook and suffered as if

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she was walking with her lotus feet upon fire fed with ghee. She wept bitterly with a raging mind and shivered. She fell and rolled on the ground. Invoking God, she threatened to destroy the world with a curse. She wondered whether it was worth living any longer. There was no one who could say whether it was merely a woman or dharma incarnate undergoing all these travails. *Seeta bemoaned, "Dear father, what a pity that because of me you have to suffer the agony of being caught by the Rākshasās. Is it your reward for begetting me as a daughter? You are not only the father but also the mother of the people of the world. You are the very personification of dharma and penance."* Seeta was at the height of her misery. Her mind suffered like wood thrown into fire. She finally fell on the ground. Again addressing the false Janaka, she wailed, "Even before you ate your food, you fed your guests. You performed many charitable acts. You scorched the cities of the enemies. Doing great yāgas, you reached glorious heights. But now your sturdy, diamond-like shoulders have been bound by deceitful Rākshasās who consume liquor and human flesh. How cruel is destiny which forces me, your daughter, to witness your helpless state with the very eyes which have seen your glory in the past."

Seeta lost her composure and could no longer stand. Steeped in sorrow, she heaved a sigh and fell to the ground as if lifeless. Her body looked like a streak of lightning that had fallen and rolled on the ground. Like a grief-stricken nightingale, she wailed, "Dear father, you hail from a royal dynasty which never departed from the scriptures. *Even for carrying out your obligations to your married daughters, you did not come and stay in the ancient city of Ayōdhya, of my beloved Lord Rāma.* How strange it is that you now come as a captive to see me in prison! Scholars firmly believe that Lord Tirumāl will free people from their mundane prison replete with illusions. However, when I do not see anyone coming forward to free me from my prison, who is there in this world who can release you from the captivity for which I am the cause? It would have been better if you had been killed by an arrow and reached the heroes' heaven instead of being caught by these brutes. You attained glory in the past as a king in the company of great persons. Now, captured by the enemy, you have become sullied. This is not of your making. This is because of having me as your daughter! Who would have attained your 'good fortune'? I am in agony like a young bull tied to the yoke carrying the load on a hot day, getting beaten up and about to collapse after continued ploughing in the mire. Sinner as I am, I did not give up my life as soon as I was captured. As a result, I have sold all of you to the enemies. If I fall into hell because of this, can I be saved from it? Having stayed

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in the prison of my enemies, I neither had the boundless joy of seeing them killed, nor the pleasure of keeping the divine feet of my beloved Rāma over my head. I have only undergone misery for a number of days. I have destroyed you along with all your people and consumed the name of the famous kings of Ayōdhya. For my husband, I have created a deadly enemy and the task of killing him. Even after seeing the mountainous shoulders of my father being tied with ropes, I have not made any attempt to release him. I have only been a silent spectator.

"I have brought suffering both to the land of my birth and my husband's abode. Still, I who deserve to die, am not dead. As a reward for the unique offerings made in the past, my father obtained me. His sturdy shoulders which supported those who sought his succour like a float which supports those boarding it, have now been tied and allowed to roll in the dust. Will I give up my life only after seeing my husband, too, in this state? O mothers, elders and my dear sisters! Have none of you realised the present humiliation of my father who brought me into this world? Has similar humiliation been meted out to all of you? Perhaps you are all dead, as I find none coming near him to offer help. While it is possible to climb the peak of the Meru and invade the celestial world, it is impossible for anyone to enter the city of Lanka surrounded by the sea. Dear father, even if the Rākshasās kill you in a fight, or indulge in deceptive acts, there is no one to report all that happened to you. Do you, too, have a Hanuman with you? These Rākshasās who could capture my father, Janaka, and bring him here will no doubt capture and bring the ascetic Bharata, too. After he is caught by our enemies, neither Rāma, nor his brother, Lakshmana, will live long. Why should those ascetics following dharma be repeatedly subjected to such cruelties? The army of vānaras filled the sea, crossed the high wall of Lanka and slew our enemies. The happy news was frequently conveyed to me, and I derived unique pleasure. Even that has now been shattered by a quirk of fate." After these words, sorrowful Seeta lost her consciousness.

Rāvana who had shorn the celestials of their greatness, was like a sharp cruel sword. Though happy at the pitiable state of Seeta, he felt that she would no longer bear this agony. He wanted to seize the opportunity to speak to her and make her change her mind. Hoping that Seeta might wish to protect Janaka and free herself from her misery, Rāvana told her, "O swan-like young beauty, I started inflicting untold hardship on you with the desire of attaining you. Pardon me for this sin. I will henceforth neither order anyone to annihilate those in the city of Mithila, nor permit the slaying of Janaka. Do not fear. If vou can cure me of my agonizing malady, I will

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bequeath the celestial world or the seven worlds, or my own kingdom spread over the three worlds to Janaka. Let him choose whichever he wants. I will live paying my respects to him always. If you so desire, I will grant Lanka to Janaka and seek another place for myself. I will give him Kubera's two treasures, the 'conch' and the 'lotus'. I will present the celestial chariot to Janaka and also the victorious sword, *Candrahāsa*, that Lord Siva gave me. O Seeta, convey your slightest assent through your coral mouth, and I will forthwith adorn your father with Devendra's crown and will serve him at his coronation. *If you yield to my desire, my great-grandfather Lord Brahma will voluntarily grant the boons sought by Janaka. Yama will serve you in all manner of ways as if he is your servant. If you do not happen to be Goddess Lakshmi, she, too, will serve you. All those belonging to the three worlds will serve Janaka. The advantage he has in having a doll-like daughter will never go to waste. Give him the rare fortune of reigning over the three worlds. Reap the fruits of being born as his daughter."*

Seeta became furious. She replied, "It will only be Lord Devendra who will rule the three worlds. It will only be Vibheeshana who will enjoy your false wealth, including the city of Lanka. The arrows released by Rāma, the Supreme Lord, deserve to pierce your chest, while his divine feet deserve to be placed over my head. Rāma's arrows will scoff at you and pierce your heart, leaving gaping wounds. The deafening sound from Rāma's bow will make even the mountains topple. Lotus-eyed Rāma's arrows will certainly get embedded in your chest. The crows will happily peck your eyes and eat them. Thereafter, demons smelling of flesh will embrace your chest. Rāma's strong, steel-like arrows will sever all your grotesque heads and scatter them. I am sure to hear the news of your death with glee, when Hanuman wearing a tulasi garland comes to escort me to Rāma. O wretched one! I will tell you something more. *In this war, the life of your darling son, Indrajit, will be taken away by Lakshmana, the eminent son of our beloved mother, Sumitra. A dog will be licking Indrajit's dead body, and you will be bitterly mourning aloud (a sound pleasant to my ears) over his death."* Cruel Rāvana heard Seeta's harsh words and glared at her. He wrung his many hands. Biting his lips, he ran towards her to harm her but he was restrained by Mahōdaran who advised him that if her father were to appeal to her, she would submit. Thereafter, Rāvana returned to his seat. The false Janaka who was lying on the ground as though he were dead, told Seeta, "If you do not yield, you will be responsible for my destruction along with my race. Goddess Lakshmi, the dweller in the lotus flower is common to all. O daughter born to this sinner! As a prisoner I may

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have to lose my life. Is that good? You, too, weep needlessly in prison. Is it sinful to be the wife of Rāvana, a king of celestials? Have pity on me. Spare my life, allow me and my kin to live long, and lead an enjoyable life." The false Janaka spoke as if he were pleading with her to save his life, and fell at her golden feet!

Seeta shut her ears in disgust. Breathing a hot sigh, she fell, unconscious. When she regained her senses she became furious. *She felt her father would never stoop to utter those despicable words just to protect his life.* Angered by the false Janaka's words, she said, "You have uttered most ignoble words to the peril of dharma, age-old norms, kingly valour, truth and the scriptures and virtues protected by the Devas. *Are you really Janaka, my father?* Instead of earning the encomiums of great scholars, it is a pity that there are kings like you who are keen to live, sacrificing justice and morality and earning rebukes. Transgressing dharma, I would never want to live in this world even for the sake of your life. *I can only serve Rāma, an incarnation of Hari of the thousand names.* I will never, even for the love of my life, look at Rāvana, a cur. You mean fellow worse than a dog! Apart from Rāma, all others are only insects falling into the fire. *A lioness having all along lived happily with a lion, will never opt to live with a jackal from a gutter!* Because you want me to do mean things, it is clear that you are not my father at all. If you are my father, you must bless the bow of Rāma. If he wins, you will be released from our foes. Otherwise you shall die. *I have nothing more to say except that you have obtained endless blame by uttering words which should not have been uttered!"* The cruel Rāvana listened to Seeta's words and told her, "Let your thoughts be with you. Let things happen as ordained. You seem to think that the one who stands before you is not Janaka. I will kill him instantly and drink his life." And Rāvana unsheathed his sword. Without relenting, Seeta said, "You are not going to kill anyone, including yourself and me, because of your lust for me. You and your relatives, however, will not be alive thanks to my Rāma. Only then will I be relieved of my agony and attain everlasting glory." Mahōdaran intervened and told Rāvana, "This Janaka has done nothing wrong. He pleaded with his daughter to yield to you. It will be meaningless to slay him. After you defeat your mighty enemy Rāma, Seeta will be yours. Should she needlessly be in agony then, thinking of her father?" Stopped by Mahōdaran, Rāvana resumed his seat. *Suddenly Rāvana heard a tumultuous sound and a loud clamour which reached the skies. It was raised by the great army of monkeys and by the Devas after the slaying of Kumbhakarna.*

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Rāvana became concerned and thought, "The sound seems to come from the strings of Rāma's and Lakshmana's bows. The weak Devas, and the army of monkeys must have won perhaps due to the extinction of the Rākshasa army and the isolation of Kumbhakarna." Crossing the sea of security guards, messengers sped to Rāvana and whispered into his ears that his brother, Kumbhakarna, after chasing and scattering the sea of vānara warriors, was killed by Rāma. On hearing the sad news, Rāvana pushed his shining crowns to the ground and fell like a mighty uprooted tree. *Rāvana and Kumbhakarna had never been separated from each other since their birth! Rāvana always felt that though their bodies were different, their lives were one.* When the messengers told him, "Your brother, Kumbhakarna, was killed in the battle fighting for you," Rāvana wept bitterly, with his mouths wide open. His wailing was heard all over the universe. "O my brother! You were mighty, like an elephant demolishing the grove of lotuses (the Devas). O descendant of Brahma! You had once destroyed the fair name of Devendra! I, who have heard of your great achievments, have to hear this sad news about you. O holder of a lustrous leaf-like spear! I neither saw you when you fell dead, nor did I ascertain how you were then. I stayed here selfishly looking after my life. If this is the fate of a great hero like you, will not Devendra go back to his golden capital, riding merrily on his elephant Irāvatam? Leaving a strong-willed person like me, if you are to reach the heaven meant for heroes, then none would like to be born as a brother to anyone. Will not those Asuras who were once scared by the very sight of you, slap their chests and parade as heroes now that you are dead and gone? The northern Meru was just a stone for you, to rub your feet and remove the dirt while you bathed! My mind burns when I hear that you were slain by an ordinary man. You were once attacked by the Trident of Siva, the Disc of Tirumāl, and the Thunderbolt of Devendra; but unable to harm you, they went back the way they came. *How funny it is that arrows shot by a mere man pierced your body! And the great Rāvana still gazes at his own shoulders, considering them to be symbols of valour!* I have lived a dishonourable life because of my lust for Seeta. This has caused the death and disappearance of my younger brothers, and the city of Lanka to be captured by our enemies. My infatuation has caused the death of my uncle, Mārica. Should I live even after losing you, my Kumbhakarna? I was waiting to hear that you had slain Rāma and his brother Lakshmana, Neelan, Sugreeva, Angada, Hanuman, and Jāmbavan. How is it that even before this happened you are dead? You used to rest on a bed of flowers in a beautiful hall with cool breeze, where innocent girls held your legs. Today, in the battlefield, you lie on a bed of dust where demons dance to the beat of drums. I have decided to give up my life and follow you at once. O my mighty brother resembling a rutting elephant! I am coming!" *Rāvana wept aloud bitterly making the whole universe hear him. He showed*

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everyone the meaning of his name, Rāvana – one who screams aloud!

Beautiful Seeta was in great joy. She no longer looked emaciated. She swelled with happiness and appeared like someone else. She heaved a sigh, making others realise that she was alive. Who could describe Seeta who appeared so beautiful that she deserved to have the impeccable and chaste Goddess Lakshmi as her maid? *Earlier, Seeta had visualised how Rāma and Kumbhakarna would have faced each other in their fight, and had been full of agony. But she became happy when she heard that the gigantic Kumbhakarna was killed by the unfailing arrows of victorious Rāma.* Rāvana was furious. He declared, "I will destroy all those in this insurmountable world, who were responsible for the death of my brother Kumbhakarna. I will also imprison the eternal Trinity of Gods, and the immortal Devas." Rāvana who was once victorious in all directions, partially got over his wrath after being consoled by his ministers. He boasted, "With the blood of Rāma and Lakshmana, I shall forthwith perform the last rites of my younger brother Kumbhakarna," and left the place with furious eyes. Mahōdaran decided to be silent. He felt sad that vultures were circling over Kumbhakarna who was slain in that great battlefield. He went in a different direction after ordering 'Janaka' to be sent to prison. *Tirisadai was always kind to Seeta (with her twisted dusty hair attracting no bees). Consoling her, sweet Tirisadai said, "That false Janaka pretending to be your father and standing before you, was only the wicked and deceitful Rākshasa Maruttan in disguise." Seeta who trusted the words of Tirisadai was relieved of her agony.*

17. THE SLAYING OF ATIKĀYAN

Rāvana was more furious than the pralaya submarine fire. He glared at his ministers who were making obeisance to him from either side. Making even thunder and clouds flee, he roared, "My fierce army (capable of outwitting the enemies) and your vast army (capable of destroying the enemies) jointly fought our adversaries. Still they could not meet the cruel attack from the enemy bows. Do not look at my face. Leave this place at once. You boasted that you would confront Rāma and Lakshmana and return only after killing them. You neither prevented my brother, Kumbhakarna, from fighting alone, nor did you give him protection. You could have at least laid down your lives before he died in the battle. Still you stand here in the row of heroes! *I ruled the three worlds relying solely on my valour. You amassed wealth in this birth only because of my victories.* At least hereafter, exhibit

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your courage. If, however, you cannot fight, be frank and say so. On my own, I shall defeat the enemies, destroy their might and cause agony to them. I shall pierce these men with the sharp tip of my spear and make lofty Yama extract their lives. Only if you assure me that you will win, may you go to the battlefield. If you feel that you are certain to die, do not proceed."

Atikāyan (son of Rāvana through his wife Dāniyamāli), a hero whose courage even the fury of destiny could not shake, rose with great self-respect. Hurt by Rāvana's words, he said, "Let those in the sky or the earth, or Lord Vishnu or the five-faced Siva fear to go to battle. I do not care. But to think that I would be afraid to go, is a shame. Did I not bring before you the mighty Asuras? Did I not make the Devas spin around like a potter's wheel? Do you think I am Akshakumāran who was rubbed on the ground and killed despite possessing a powerful weapon, or Kumbhakarna who lost his life to a few arrows, or Vibheeshana who was misled by the prowess of Rāma and Lakshmana? *I will cease to be your son if I do not make Rāma who killed your brother, Kumbhakarna, tremble with fear, and cause him great agony by killing Lakshmana, his brother.* I will sever the heads of those monkeys (now fighting fiercely) and throw them on the ground. I will bring before you, the two archers, Rāma and Lakshmana, bound in ropes. You will see this! Direct me to go to war all alone or with a vast army. I will obey. Please let me know your wish." Rāvana said, "You spoke boldly and well. *If you snatch the life of Lakshmana, I will terminate the war the very next day.* O wearer of a hero's anklets, proceed with three thousand crores of infantry, and an army of elephants, chariots and cavalry capable of protecting you." Directing several fresh armies to go with Atikāyan, Rāvana told him, "Your red chariot shedding golden light will be flanked by the fierce Rākshasās, Kumban, Nikumban and Akamban. Get into this chariot I am presenting you. Resembling the Bull of Lord Siva, this chariot shall be in the front line. It shall be drawn by a thousand bridled victorious horses. Another thousand chariots drawn by a thousand horses shall be on either side of your chariot and follow you to protect you. Crores of mighty, rutting elephants capable of killing the enemy, and a number of horses shall accompany you."

Paying obeisance to Rāvana, Atikāyan got up, took his sturdy bow in his hand, covered his chest with a suit of golden armour and stood like a cloud. On seeing him, the Devas became frightened. *As his very name suggested, Atikāyan possessed a gigantic physique, bigger even than the body of an elephant. Surrounded by warriors capable of shouting down anyone, Atikāyan sported several weapons which shed*

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brighter light than the hot sun. Countless lions, and dark-complexioned elephants adorned with ornaments, raised a mighty roar striking terror into everyone. The huge sea was frightened by the twanging of bows. Moist clouds were disturbed by the beating of drums. The warriors made such a din that the sky shook. They walked with such heavy steps that Mother Earth felt that she was being excavated. The clouds combined with lightning, moved along with the lofty flags held on elephants, as if female elephants were speedily following their mates. Exquisite rutted elephants were spurred on by the elephant-goads, resulting in a copious flow of rutting fluid converting the path traversed by the army into a mire. *Like the halo moving along with the red-rayed sun, many chariots moved along with Atikāyan's chariot!* Elephants with decorated face-plates accompanied by galloping horses went alongside his chariot like a cluster of black clouds. Surveying the battlefield where Rāma (like a rutting elephant) had playfully destroyed the Rākshasās, Atikāyan was full of agony and was dejected. *He saw Kumbhakarna's severed body looking like a black sea and the legs and shoulders resembling sundered mountains.* He saw the humiliating end of that great hero but could not see the huge head of his uncle. Depressed and heaving a hot sigh, Atikāyan said, "What I find lying here is neither an elevated ground stuck with arrows touching the sky nor the body of an elephant protecting one of the eight regions. *It is the body of my invincible father, Kumbhakarna. Have I come here only to see these agonizing scenes?* I will not care to protect my life. I will never be relieved of my sorrow till I kill those men who are still alive and moving about. *I will destroy the body of Lakshmana, the brother of Rāma, in the same manner Rāma destroyed Kumbhakarna, and I will see Rāma grieve. Only then will I be consoled."*

Turning to a messenger known as Mayidan, Atikāyan said, "Go fast to Lakshmana and tell him that I have entered the battlefield just to pluck his head and that my decision is just and fair. Tell him first, 'With the sole object of relieving the sorrow of his father, Rāvana, who is weeping for his brother, Kumbhakarna, the son, Atikāyan, with a raging heart and unrelieved agony has come to the battlefield'. Tell Lakshmana I have taken a vow in furious Rāvana's assembly that I will shoot arrows which will sever his legs and make them roll on the ground. Tell him that I do not worry about the harmful consequences of my action. Do not regard this duty as an ordinary task of a messenger. Extend a welcome to Lakshmana with all your eloquence and bring him to me. Dear Mayidan, go quickly to Rāma and Lakshmana who seem to be eager to fight and seek name and fame! Tell them that anyone fighting with me, will only enter the abode of Yama and stay there. O knowledgeable Mayidan, if you bring

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Lakshmana before me, for relieving the agony of my father Rāvana, I will present you with great gifts which none else can offer you. If that great leonine Lakshmana engages me in single combat, I will, before the very eyes of the Devas, cut him into pieces and consume his life. *As a reward for bringing him here, I will make you a king and give you sweet-voiced women, heavenly singers and eight thousand pots of the finest variety of liquor which no one has ever consumed! I will gratefully give you lustrous ornaments set with precious gems engraved with the image of the sun, and the fine jewels that I received from the Devas and Kubera. I will also offer you lakhs of rutting elephants, exquisite golden chariots, galloping horses adorned with gem-set chains, over a thousand cart-loads of treasures, varieties of silken robes shining like the moon, heaps of jewels set with precious gems and all that you may aspire for! Proceed at once and bring Lakshmana."*

Mighty-shouldered Mayidan left instantly for the battlefield. When the monkey army rose to attack him, he informed them that he had some exciting news to be conveyed to them. Rāma (the beginning of knowledge and the ancient Lord of the scriptures) prevented the vānaras from attacking Mayidan and told them, "He is just a weaponless messenger come to convey the words of his master. He knows nothing more. Do not be angry with him." Rāma then asked Mayidan the purpose of his visit. Mayidan replied, "O great archer! O leader of kings! My message is meant only for your younger brother." Lakshmana who was near by, asked Mayidan to convey the message forthwith. Addressing him Mayidan said, "You are required to present yourself before the vast army of furious Atikāyan who, standing like the exalted Meru, awaits you. O golden-complexioned Lakshmana, if you have the strength to oppose Atikāyan and fight with him, come with me. Just as your elder brother, Rāma, pierced the body of our father, the mountain-like Kumbhakarna, you will also be killed. *You may wonder why instead of Rāma who slew Kumbhakarna, you are sought. It is only because Atikāyan is keen that Rāma should experience the same agony that Rāvana is going through now." Rāma who heard Mayidan, declared, "All those in heaven, earth and elsewhere, please listen. This Lakshmana will solitarily fight Atikāyan and all those who come to help him."* Uttering these words, Rāma worshipped by learned men, embraced Lakshmana and asked him to proceed at once without delay.

The virtuous Vibheeshana told Rāma, "Let Lakshmana fight this great archer, Atikāyan, assisted by all of us. Atikāyan is like a ferocious lion. This Atikāyan who has arrived like a dark cloud riding a chariot, has done great penance. Because of the boon

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secured from Lord Brahma, he stands alive, sturdy and mighty, without losing his strength! Great Rāvana brought him up with the object of excavating Mount Meru where the Devas live. This Atikāyan is capable of churning the ocean of milk with his legs and obtaining the deadly poison as well as the nectar of immortality without the aid of Lord Tirumāl or the Mandara mountain or the serpent Vāsuki or the exalted Devas. Even if Lord Siva who never closes His eyes despite the passage of countless yugas, were to hurl His Trident at Atikāyan, he would hold it and ask Lord Siva scornfully, 'Is what you hurled at me, only this trident?' Several cities of the Devas were burnt by Atikāyan. He even stopped Lord Tirumāl's Disc which was dispatched to kill him. *Atikāyan who has now come here, has learnt from Lord Siva, the art of archery (described in the scriptures) inscrutable even to the Devas. Atikāyan has secured rare and mighty weapons which can be handled only by him. He knows nothing but righteous things. He does not wear any ornament other than heroism and has not slain any but the strong. His ambition is to attain great name and fame. This Atikāyan, even when his life is in danger, will not indulge in any deceitful acts irrespective of his adversaries adopting such methods against him."*

Vibheeshana continued, "Two deceitful Asuras known as Madhu and Kaidava captured the cities of the Devas and destroyed them. Driven by destiny, these Asuras also attacked Lord Tirumāl and earned His wrath. They got into the ocean of milk and challenged the Lord to a fight. He accepted the challenge. These two who had the unique distinction of defeating a thousand mighty adversaries in a straight fight, with a smile, wrestled in vain with Lord Tirumāl for several thousand days. At last they told the unique Lord with the lustrous golden face, 'There is none in the world as mighty as you are. Each one of us can individually swallow the seven worlds and spit them out. You fought the two of us gloriously, single-handed, for several days. You may seek from us any boon you want. It is only with the object of doing you good that we offer this boon'. Wanting to kill them, Lord Tirumāl asked them to tell Him how He could defeat them. *Madhu and Kaidava who were determined to die, told Tirumāl that they would lay down their lives only on His unique thigh and urged Him to lodge them there. The incomprehensible Tirumāl extended His left thigh till it covered the world above and below. Madhu and Kaidava, led by destiny, were caught in the thigh of the unique Lord Tirumāl who with His mighty mace smashed them. This huge earth was covered with the fat of Madhu and acquired the name of Medhini. In this Yuga, the truly mighty Madhu took birth as my brother Kumbhakarna, while Kaidava resembling the sun,*

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as Atikāyan holding the lustrous vél."

Rāma flashed a smile and said, "Let good things happen. You are going to see the great archery of Lakshmana. He is capable of confronting billions of Rāvanas along with all the celestials, including the unapproachable Trinity of Gods. Whether it is one living in the celestial world or in this world, whether it is Lord Tirumāl, Lord Siva, or Devendra, or for that matter even I, when my brother Lakshmana becomes furious, no one is a match for him. Neither divine weapons, nor great anger, nor prowess, nor flawless penance, can withstand him. The moment he touches his bow with his hands, all these will vanish. *O great Vibheeshana, Rāvana who took away my wife through deceit would have been slain by Lakshmana that very day. It was only because of his inability to disobey her commands, that he had to leave her unprotected and run in search of me. That is how Rāvana is still alive.* Please go with Lakshmana and see for yourself Atikāyan's severed head brought down by his arrow and eaten by crows and other birds. With whose support are we confronting the most cruel Rākshasās in this war that is being fought for the sake of the Devas? Only with the help of Lakshmana, the embodiment of dharma, can these Rākshasās be defeated. *If Atikāyan cannot be defeated by Lord Siva, only Lord Tirumāl can defeat him. If He cannot, only Lord Brahma can. If Lord Brahma cannot, Lakshmana alone can defeat him.* If even Lakshmana cannot do this, who else is there to defeat Atikayan? It was this solitary Lakshmana who killed the mighty warriors (billions of them) who had accompanied Kumbhakarna. Like the all-powerful Tirumāl, Lakshmana is going to fight with Atikāyan and all the cruel Rākshasās. I want you alone to go with him."

Lakshmana circumambulated Rāma thrice and prostrated himself before him. Followed by the wise and mighty Vibheeshana, Lakshmana entered the battlefield where Atikāyan had already arrived. The ocean of elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry of the Rākshasās, and the armies of monkeys assisting Lakshmana, began to fight with one another as if all other seas were waging war against the southern sea. The shouting armies threw up dust (like the pollen of the red flower) which reached the sky. The sound of the war-drums, the thunderous noise of the conches, the loud clamour of the warriors, and the twang of bows forced the sea to 'shrink' out of fear! The blood from the bodies of slain mahouts flowed like a river. Mighty creepers with their leaves fell from their supporting poles. The monkeys jumped from the head of one elephant to another, as if from one rock to another. *With trees appearing like the tusks of elephants and with streams of honey flowing from them, mountains looked like*

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rutting elephants. Such mountains were thrown by the monkeys at the elephants, giving an impression that it was a fight between elephants. The horses of the Rākshasās were attacked furiously by the vānara hordes. They caught hold of some of the horses, cut some of them into pieces, and bit the heads of some, severing them from their bodies. The horses fell in the flood of blood with their dangling legs twitching.

Hit by the monkeys, the elephants, like a cluster of clouds caught in a whirlwind, lost their strength and collapsed. Their broken tusks spilled heaps of pearls. Attacked by the diamond pillar-like legs of the vānaras and by their tails which looked like Yama's rope, the Rākshasās fell and rolled on the ground. Struck by the spears of the Rākshasās, the vānara warriors, too, fell on the ground. Herds of monkeys collectively threw mountains containing stones, red trees, serpents with sword-like teeth, elephants and horses, at the Rākshasās, making the sky look like a wild forest. The huge rocks thrown by the commanders of the vānara army, rose to the sky and fell on the Rākshasās like clouds settling on the wide sea. Running hither and thither, the Rākshasās with their weapons slipped and fell into the flood of blood. A troop of monkeys which went across the river of blood and perched on the backs of elephants, was dragged along with them, by the force of the blood-stream, right into the sea. *A few other monkeys got their legs caught in the flood of blood, but managed to move in it holding one another's tails, like the blind leading the blind holding a long stick and walking in a river.* The vast Rākshasa army attacked the vānaras several times and chased them. *Lakshmana repeatedly tried to inspire the vānara army. Twanging his bow he raised a loud sound which spread everywhere like the eternal Védas.* Lord Yama became happy. Lakshmana shot scorching arrows which vanished into the bodies of the Rākshasās. Rākshasa corpses filled the space between the sky and the earth. The blood flowing from these bodies reached the low-lying sea of blood. Lakshmana's speeding arrows severed the trunks of elephants and threw them out, sundered the charioteers' heads adorned with crowns, cut the legs of horses and pierced the flesh of the cruel-eyed Rākshasās. *The curved white tusks of the fierce elephants were cut with such force that they touched the sky and looked like several third-day crescent moons.*

Lakshmana's arrows made the dark headless trunks of the Rākshasās dance, as if in ecstasy, for being relieved from this world. If one headless trunk danced for the death of every fourteen thousand warriors, one can imagine from the millions of headless trunks that danced on the battlefield that day, how many billions of Rākshasās had died by Lakshmana's arrows! Who can describe at length his prowess

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and greatness? Copious blood from the elephants, Rākshasās and galloping horses killed in action, flowed like the celestial river and reached the sea. Holding elephant-goads, truncated Rākshasās (with their heads severed by Lakshmana's arrows) rode on elephants! *The headless trunks of warriors with mighty long hands, sitting on the backs of horses, joined the dancing of the horses, shocking the onlookers! Like the unfailing curses of sages, Lakshmana's arrows hit their targets accurately and snatched the heads of the charioteers, too. Innumerable headless trunks of Rākshasās continued to bend their bows and shoot arrows as fast as before! The Rākshasās who appeared to have sought for themselves a harsh Yama in the guise of Seeta, lost not only their fathers, brothers, beloved sons, grandsons and sons-in-law in the war, but also their own precious lives, pierced by the arrows which flew fast like a raging storm from the bow of Lakshmana.* Without any inducement, these arrows sped of their own accord and severed the Rākshasa heads, which the vultures grabbed and took high up into the air. Crores of fire-spitting arrows shot by Lakshmana flew with the speed of the mind, killing the Rākshasās. *The legs of the messengers of Yama became tired, but Lakshmana's arrows did not rest. They went on killing mighty Rākshasās, and earning the encomiums of the Devas. Mother Earth was unable to bear the weight of the heaps of corpses falling on her!*

Tārukan, a fierce Rākshasa whose eyes spat fire and who held a bow, entered the battlefield in a chariot. Shooting long and fiery arrows secured through boons, he confronted Lakshmana. *Boiling with fury, Lakshmana scattered those arrows with his own arrows which finally sped and severed Tārukan's big head, frightening even Lord Yama.* The five Rākshasās known as Kālan, Kulisan, Kālasankan, Māli, and Maruttan, hurled axes and tridents at Lakshmana. These as well as thousands of other weapons hurled by the Rākshasās were severed by Lakshmana's arrows. After this, Lakshmana went on to destroy their chariots, elephants, cavalry and infantry. Immediately, Atikāyan's warriors deploying fifty-six thousand wild elephants, surrounded Lakshmana and began to shower their choicest weapons on him. They also laid siege to the vānara army with a great clamour and ground those who opposed them into a paste. *The rocks thrown by the vānara warriors and the arrows shot by the Rākshasās attacked each other with great sound and fury. They filled all the regions with lightning speed, covered the sky and appeared like a canopy of thundering clouds.* Lakshmana's unique arrows pierced the rock-like rogue elephants that surrounded him and severed their trunks, tusks and heads. Every arrow accounted for the slaying of not one, but as many as nine or ten rutting elephants. Each time Lakshmana shot

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an arrow from his bow, renowned Rākshasās with their legs inserted into stirrups, fell on the ground like mountains. Rutting, rock-like elephants also died fighting. Even the most furious elephants (attacked by thunderous arrows) lost their bridles, the royal seats on their backs and their might, and rolled down in all directions.

Lakshmana's unfailing and scorching arrows not only cut the flags hoisted on the elephants but also cut the elephants into pieces, and severed the big heads of the mahouts, relieving the hungry demons (with sunken eyes) of their starvation. The blood oozing from the elephants turned into a flood and dashed against the sea, like an elephant fighting another elephant. With the death of the mahouts, there was none to guide the elephants. Shedding rutting fluid from their temples they began to fight with one another. Some elephants lost their tails. The bellies of a few elephants were ripped and their bowels came out. A few of them found their skins shorn. Lakshmana's arrows were shot fiercely from all directions killing fifty-six thousand rutting elephants! The furious Rākshasa foes, using the surviving elephants, surrounded Lakshmana on all sides like the sea. These Rākshasās showered arrows on his army, led countless rutting elephants against him and made him invisible like the clouds screening the sun. *The moment Lakshmana bent his rainbow-like bow, the cloud-like elephants fell scattered on the ground. Mountainous elephants with eyes emitting sparks of fire, had their backs broken, faces shattered and trunks severed. But still they did not come out of their rutting ecstasy.* These elephants were dragged into the middle of the sea by the flood of blood. Lakshmana showered a thousand sharp and fierce arrows at a time (like torrential rains) on two thousand rutting elephants and killed them instantly, rendering even the Devas incapable of assessing the prowess of his archery. Rāvana sent another hundred thousand rutting elephants which were also destroyed within a nāzhigai by Lakshmana's arrows. All the beings of the world were terrified. For the third time, to support Atikāyan, Rāvana sent ferocious elephants never before seen in war. These rogue elephants, numbering a crore, were directed by the Rākshasās to face the leonine Lakshmana. The furious elephants appeared to be ready to destroy instantly all the mountains of the world, and surrounded him. But thanks to the exceptional archery of Lakshmana, all of them lost their heads and trunks!

Wild rutting elephants were roaming about in all directions covering a distance of thousands of yojanas. All were frightened to see the world suddenly full of elephants. The dust raised by the elephants filled the air. The crowd of demons could find neither the tails nor the heads of the slain elephants, but only their mountainous bodies.

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Watching Lakshmana annihilating dark elephants, the mountains and the black clouds were frightened because of the similarity in their complexion. Black and dark forests, the elephants protecting the eight directions, the rising tides of the sea and even Lord Vināyaka possessing five arms, were all frightened by Lakshmana's fury. The twang of his bow, after killing the elephants in the forests, was carried by the air into the sky. The arrows shot by him pierced through the heads and bodies of the mahouts as if they were attacked by heavy thunder. Simulating the seven mighty seas, Rākshasās holding spears directed the herd of elephants to move forward. *Hanuman who was like Lakshmana's unique spear, suddenly appeared on the scene.* Looking like the foremost lion and wearing a hero's anklets, the famous Hanuman paid homage to the divine feet of Rāma. With a roar and a furious look, he uprooted a tree mightier than the club of Yama and hit all the elephants with a force comparable to that of thunder striking a mountain during pralaya! *Righteous Hanuman killed some of the elephants by trampling them. Many of them were killed by his swift movements, by his strength, by his walk, by his roar, by the force of his breathing, by the tip of his tail, by his forehead, by his kneading them with his palms and by his jumping on them. Furious Hanuman dragged some elephants, fractured a few, wounded some of them with his nails, bent some like bamboos, tore the hide of a few, cut some of them into pieces, bit a few with his teeth, crushed some of them, caught hold of a few with his hands and broke the tusks of some others!*

Hanuman collected the elephants and threw them into the roaring sea. Holding a long tree-trunk he made the elephants roam about right and left and roll down. He smashed them, held them in his hands and dashed them against the earth, plucked their bowels, threw them over the sky, trampled them with his legs, and constricted them like a python. After dragging the elephants over a distance, he threw them along with their mahouts over big mountains. Leonine Hanuman killed thousands of them in the twinkling of an eye! Out of a crore of these great rutting elephants, the valiant and capable Hanuman killed a hundred thousand. Lakshmana killed the rest with his fierce arrows. The guardians of the eight regions were frightened and ran amuck. Carcasses of elephants were thrown in all directions. The bruised ones ran helter-skelter and in the melee killed others. The Rākshasās who were driving the chariots could not move ahead. They abandoned the chariots and ran away. *Suddenly a furious Rākshasa known as Devāntakan appeared on the battlefield. Even though the sea of blood and the mountain of corpses appeared to be several and not just one, Devāntakan in his big chariot entered the battleground, all alone, and began to fight.*

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Raising a roar that would subdue even the roaring sea, he shot scorching arrows at Hanuman to pierce his body. Uprooting a tree, and declaring loudly that Devāntakan's life would soon be lost, Hanuman threw it at him like wild thunder. Devāntakan contemptuously shot a quick and fiery arrow to cut it in two.

The victorious Hanuman, immediately dug up a mountain. Even before it could be hurled, Devāntakan shot an arrow and pulverised it. The proud and furious Hanuman, pounced like an eagle upon him, snatched his bow and broke it into several pieces to the delight of the Devas. Seeing Hanuman's extraordinary valour, the heroic Devāntakan became furious. He immediately took an iron pestle and hurled it at Hanuman's left shoulder. The Devas were alarmed. Celibate Hanuman, raging like fire, removed the pestle and attacked Devāntakan with his fist, raising thunder. Devāntakan's charioteer rolled to the ground along with the chariot. The Devas once again became happy. When Devāntakan hurled his trident, Hanuman intercepted it within a split second and began to fight. *Devāntakan, who was deadlier than the Hālāhala poison, fought with Hanuman who resembled Yama's eyes. Hanuman slapped Devāntakan on a vital part of his cheek, broke his head and killed him.* Atikāyan saw this. With a raging heart shedding tears of blood, he decided not to rest till he killed Hanuman. He directed his charioteer to face Hanuman who stood opposing Atikāyan. The despondent Rākshasa army became active and raised their heads. The army which had retreated now came forward, and those who were scattered in different directions began to rally. *Atikāyan who was capable of breaking the Meru, and Hanuman who resembled that very Meru, met face to face and exchanged heroic words.*

Atikāyan told Hanuman, "You killed my younger brother, the unique Akshakumāran who fought all alone, by dashing him to the ground and grating him on it. *With your incomparable stamina, you managed to escape by crossing the wide sea. You have presently entered the sea of Rākshasās and have slain Devāntakan.* Having seen all this, I have come before you. Only because your end is near, have you come close to me. If I fail to kill you today, I will never oppose you again. You have committed not one, but several cruel deeds. I will not go back without killing you and Lakshmana." Hanuman laughed loudly. Kneading his hands, he replied, "Why are you angry with me and leonine Lakshmana? First of all bring Trisiran here. I will positively grind him into a paste on the ground. My words will never fail." The three-headed Trisiran heard these words and said, "It is but proper that you fight with me." With a roar, he came forward to fight with Hanuman. Rāma's unique envoy fought with

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Trisiran accusing him of not knowing dharma. *Effortlessly walking through the battleground, Hanuman jumped on his chariot and flung his mountain-like body to the ground, crushing him to death.* Announcing aloud that he would be proceeding to the battle raging near the western gate, Hanuman suddenly went away. Watching Hanuman with fiery and bloodshot eyes, a dazed Atikāyan remained inactive for some time and said to himself, "Even Lord Siva will not be able to face the fury of this Hanuman. It will not be proper for me to indulge in some other activity after entering the battlefield to kill Lakshmana. Let me first test the prowess of Lakshmana who is hailed as the mightiest."

Atikāyan told his charioteer to take the chariot towards Lakshmana. The sound raised by his chariot exceeded the sound of the sea. The sound produced by his bow exceeded the sound of rain, while the sound of the war-drums went beyond the eight regions. Atikāyan wearing a garland on his chest and a hero's anklets, proceeded with his army. He was confronted by the brave Lakshmana for whose victory the Devas prayed. At that moment, Angada promptly came there. He paid his respects to Lakshmana and said, "Atikāyan is fighting from a chariot. O supreme archer, please get onto my shoulders and fight (though I am unfit to carry your divine body)." Lakshmana agreed. Angada carrying Lakshmana, resembled the celestial Garuda carrying Lord Vishnu on his shoulders. The Devas lauded his noble act and showered flowers on him. Sturdy Angada, the son of Vāli, roaring like Garuda, moved in whichever direction Atikāyan's chariot drawn by a thousand horses sped. If the chariot rose upwards, Angada would lift himself. If it dipped, he, too, would dip. If it touched the sky, Angada would go there too. Seeing this, the vānara leaders became jubilant. The Devas exclaimed that this was a rare feat of which even Garuda was incapable. In the mean time, Lakshmana's shower of arrows pierced Atikāyan's horses and elephants. There was a great clamour. The war-drums boomed. The elephants trumpeted lustily. The mighty chariots clattered. The horses neighed loudly. The full-sized white conches blared out. The collective sound of the heroes' anklets, bows and tinkling bells, was thrice as loud as thunder.

Lakshmana's rain of arrows killed the elephants, killed large portions of the infantry, killed the galloping horses and burnt the gold-plated chariots. Even Yama was frightened at the sight. The Rākshasa army was decimated. The battlefield appeared deserted. *Lakshmana, the brother of Rāma, asked Atikāyan, the son of Rāvana, "What is your wish? Do you want to offer a big fight throughout the battlefield now, or wait till the vast army assisting you is completely destroyed?"* Cruel

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Atikāyan looking like Yama replied, "There is no one who can fight except me. Let the two of us do the fighting using various methods of warfare, so that the Devas, too, can witness them. Those who have come to protect you can join you. Let your brother come and guard you. Let Lord Siva try to save you. Let all the Devas combine to protect you. Let all the people of the seven worlds help you. Despite all their efforts, your life will end today." Atikāyan blew his conch. Lakshmana smiled gently and said, "None of those you mentioned will assist me. If you manage to vanquish me in the fight, that will be as good as your vanquishing all of them, too." Lakshmana at once shot a deadly lustrous arrow brighter than lightning. The huge-shouldered Atikāyan returned a scorching arrow which cut Lakshmana's arrow into pieces in the sky. Atikāyan then shot sixteen darts as poisonous as the cobra and challenged Lakshmana to meet them.

Atikāyan's darts were broken to pieces by Lakshmana who strained the bow and shot mighty arrows. capable of breaking the Meru. Atikāyan, who had vanquished Kubera, destroyed all these arrows easily. In turn, he shot sharp arrows which were cut and shattered by Lakshmana's fiery arrows. Even then Atikāyan shouted aloud. Enraged at this, Lakshmana, with unerring accuracy, shot divine arrows which pierced Atikāyan's shield and entered his body. A fatigued Atikāyan rested for some time, with his divine bow leaning on the chariot. During this interval, Lakshmana shot countless arrows, which cut Atikāyan's entire army into pieces and took away one crore lives. Atikāyan became angry. He shot arrows thrice as profusely as a natural downpour of rain. The sky was replete with arrows. The boundaries of the sky, the entire earth, the mountain peaks and the bodies of those living there were all full of arrows. The arrows also pierced those who stood dazed, killed the fishes in the sea and filled every other place. The fierce arrows shot by the furious Atikāyan screened all the eight regions, making them invisible and reduced the brightness of the sun, moon, and fire. The volley of arrows hit one another, too. The earth and the sky trembled. Sparks flew everywhere, causing a series of fires.

The alarmed Devas said, "The vānara army, victorious so far, is on the verge of complete annihilation. Will Rāma's brother, Lakshmana, be able to defeat Atikāyan? How great is his archery? Has he learnt the art of slaying from Yama?" In the mean time Atikāyan shot arrows, (disguising their sharp edges) at the forehead, shoulders and chest of Angada and directed three deadly arrows at Lakshmana. Blowing the conch loudly and striking terror among the Devas, whose heads shook, Atikāyan raised a great clamour. Seeing blood flowing profusely from Angada like a red stream

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flowing from a hill, Lakshmana sliced the heads of the thousand horses drawing Atikāyan's chariot, broke his bow and sundered the charioteer's head. Boarding another chariot, Atikāyan took another bow and continued to fight. Lakshmana soon shot the Agni-astram at Atikāyan which he countered with a similar weapon. While these darts were engaging each other, Lakshmana's, arrows more fierce than thunder, pierced Atikāyan's chest. Quite unperturbed, Atikāyan shot back thrice the number of arrows. But still, Lakshmana's lustrous and strong arrows bored innumerable holes, like those in a sieve, in Atikāyan's body. Undaunted and alive, Atikāyan continued to rain sharp golden-coloured arrows. Vāyu appeared before Lakshmana and told him that Atikāyan could be killed only by the Brahmāstram. Thanking him, Lakshmana immediately shot the great dart known as Brahmāstram which appeared like a series of flashes of lightning. *The Brahmāstram plucked Atikāyan's head and took it through the sky.* The Devas showered flowers on Lakshmana and said aloud that their sorrow had come to an end. The Rākshasās wept bitterly in desperation and ran away. The vānara army felt a sense of relief with their great enemy gone. The victorious Lakshmana then got down from the shoulders of Angada. *Vibheeshana, who saw the success of Lakshmana, was wonder-struck and heard the jubilant outbursts of the celestials known as the Siddhas. He commented, "If this is the mystic spell of Lakshmana's masterly archery, then it is certain to kill Indrajit, too!"*

A Rākshasa known as Narāntakan accosted Lakshmana and said, "Leaving the battleground, looking proudly at your own wide chest, strong shoulders and bow, (just because my elder brother, Atikāyan, possessing a beautiful chest has been killed) does not befit you. Stay on and fight." Uttering these words and holding a shining sword, Narāntakan came in a chariot towards Lakshmana. Sparks flying from his eyes, Narāntakan jumped down from his chariot with such force and fury that the earth cracked. He emerged with a shield in one hand and a dazzling sword in the other, resembling the sun with a halo. The vānara army at once threw trees and rocks at him. He smashed and scattered all of them in different directions with his sword. They ran away in fear and made way for Narāntakan like the receding moss in water. Angada instantly uprooted a mighty tree and attacked him with the speed of Rāma's arrow. Even before anyone could see the tree moving in Angada's hands, Narāntakan cut it into pieces with his sharp sword. Angada, standing bare-handed, decided that it was not heroic to leave the battlefield. In a split second, he rose like deadly poison, avoided Narāntakan's sword and firmly embraced him with a thunderous roar. Watching Angada, the Devas commented that not even Lord Siva, could have accomplished

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such a feat. *Snatching the sword from Narāntakan, Angada killed him with a roar.*

Pōrmattan, another Rākshasa, whose shoulders resembled Mount Mandara, who was always intoxicated, and who dared to swallow thunder, came to the battlefield riding a rutting elephant decorated with a face-plate. The incomparable elephant moved faster than wind, roared louder than the sea, was a killer like Yama and was more cruel than thunder. The vānaras hurled a number of rocks which were less effective than even mud-balls! The mighty trees thrown by them could only drive away the bees on the elephant's cheeks. A few vānaras were trampled to death by Pōrmattan's elephant. Some were killed by its trunk while a few others were killed by its tail and tusks. Almost the entire army of vānaras lost their lives like the Rākshasa army attacked earlier by Lakshmana's arrows. The good Neelan saw the sufferings of his army and its inability to withstand Pōrmattan's onslaught. Arriving with his army, Neelan swung a huge tree, like a disc, and scattered the Rākshasa army. Pōrmattan cut that big tree into pieces with twelve arrows. Neelan at once threw a rock at Pōrmattan, who, with a hundred arrows, pulverized it in mid-air. Neelan went in search of a bigger rock. Before he could find one, Pōrmattan's ferocious elephant extended its trunk and caught hold of him like the serpent Vāsuki encircling the splendid Mandara mountain. When it rushed forward to gore Neelan with its tusks, everyone lamented that his life was about to come to an end. *Suddenly Neelan tore away the trunk and head of the elephant and leapt into the sky. The Devas hailed the feat.* Before Neelan could descend, the headless elephant fell into the flood of blood which was already carrying many heads in its flow. Deprived of his mount, Pōrmattan, stood aloft in the sky with his crescent-moon-like bow. Neelan quickly hurled the sturdy tusks of the elephant (he had killed) at him. Pōrmattan cut these tusks to pieces with one arrow and shot another at the mountain-shouldered Neelan. Then he swiftly mounted another gigantic elephant and drove it as fast as wind and approached Neelan. The ferocious Neelan pushed Pōrmattan to the ground, in front of the elephant. Not realising that it was its master, the intoxicated elephant gored Pōrmattan with its ornamental tusks, kicked him with its legs, lifted him up with its trunk, and flung him down. Even then Pōrmattan did not die. Instead, he strangled his own elephant with his huge hands and became livid. *Seeing this, Neelan charged forward furiously, twisted the mighty hands of Pōrmattan, punched his chest hard and instantly killed him.*

Another Rākshasa known as Vayamattan entered the battlefield as if prompted by destiny for having led an evil life devoid of virtue. *His physique was bigger than a big*

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Trisiran accusing him of not knowing dharma. *Effortlessly walking through the battleground, Hanuman jumped on his chariot and flung his mountain-like body to the ground, crushing him to death.* Announcing aloud that he would be proceeding to the battle raging near the western gate, Hanuman suddenly went away. Watching Hanuman with fiery and bloodshot eyes, a dazed Atikāyan remained inactive for some time and said to himself, "Even Lord Siva will not be able to face the fury of this Hanuman. It will not be proper for me to indulge in some other activity after entering the battlefield to kill Lakshmana. Let me first test the prowess of Lakshmana who is hailed as the mightiest."

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flowing from a hill, Lakshmana sliced the heads of the thousand horses drawing Atikāyan's chariot, broke his bow and sundered the charioteer's head. Boarding another chariot, Atikāyan took another bow and continued to fight. Lakshmana soon shot the Agni-astram at Atikāyan which he countered with a similar weapon. While these darts were engaging each other, Lakshmana's, arrows more fierce than thunder, pierced Atikāyan's chest. Quite unperturbed, Atikāyan shot back thrice the number of arrows. But still, Lakshmana's lustrous and strong arrows bored innumerable holes, like those in a sieve, in Atikāyan's body. Undaunted and alive, Atikāyan continued to rain sharp golden-coloured arrows. Vāyu appeared before Lakshmana and told him that Atikāyan could be killed only by the Brahmāstram. Thanking him, Lakshmana immediately shot the great dart known as Brahmāstram which appeared like a series of flashes of lightning. *The Brahmāstram plucked Atikāyan's head and took it through the sky.* The Devas showered flowers on Lakshmana and said aloud that their sorrow had come to an end. The Rākshasās wept bitterly in desperation and ran away. The vānara army felt a sense of relief with their great enemy gone. The victorious Lakshmana then got down from the shoulders of Angada. *Vibheeshana, who saw the success of Lakshmana, was wonder-struck and heard the jubilant outbursts of the celestials known as the Siddhas. He commented, "If this is the mystic spell of Lakshmana's masterly archery, then it is certain to kill Indrajit, too!"*

A Rākshasa known as Narāntakan accosted Lakshmana and said, "Leaving the battleground, looking proudly at your own wide chest, strong shoulders and bow, (just because my elder brother, Atikāyan, possessing a beautiful chest has been killed) does not befit you. Stay on and fight." Uttering these words and holding a shining sword, Narāntakan came in a chariot towards Lakshmana. Sparks flying from his eyes, Narāntakan jumped down from his chariot with such force and fury that the earth cracked. He emerged with a shield in one hand and a dazzling sword in the other, resembling the sun with a halo. The vānara army at once threw trees and rocks at him. He smashed and scattered all of them in different directions with his sword. They ran away in fear and made way for Narāntakan like the receding moss in water. Angada instantly uprooted a mighty tree and attacked him with the speed of Rāma's arrow. Even before anyone could see the tree moving in Angada's hands, Narāntakan cut it into pieces with his sharp sword. Angada, standing bare-handed, decided that it was not heroic to leave the battlefield. In a split second, he rose like deadly poison, avoided Narāntakan's sword and firmly embraced him with a thunderous roar. Watching Angada, the Devas commented that not even Lord Siva, could have accomplished

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such a feat. *Snatching the sword from Narāntakan, Angada killed him with a roar.*

Pōrmattan, another Rākshasa, whose shoulders resembled Mount Mandara, who was always intoxicated, and who dared to swallow thunder, came to the battlefield riding a rutting elephant decorated with a face-plate. The incomparable elephant moved faster than wind, roared louder than the sea, was a killer like Yama and was more cruel than thunder. The vānaras hurled a number of rocks which were less effective than even mud-balls! The mighty trees thrown by them could only drive away the bees on the elephant's cheeks. A few vānaras were trampled to death by Pōrmattan's elephant. Some were killed by its trunk while a few others were killed by its tail and tusks. Almost the entire army of vānaras lost their lives like the Rākshasa army attacked earlier by Lakshmana's arrows. The good Neelan saw the sufferings of his army and its inability to withstand Pōrmattan's onslaught. Arriving with his army, Neelan swung a huge tree, like a disc, and scattered the Rākshasa army. Pōrmattan cut that big tree into pieces with twelve arrows. Neelan at once threw a rock at Pōrmattan, who, with a hundred arrows, pulverized it in mid-air. Neelan went in search of a bigger rock. Before he could find one, Pōrmattan's ferocious elephant extended its trunk and caught hold of him like the serpent Vāsuki encircling the splendid Mandara mountain. When it rushed forward to gore Neelan with its tusks, everyone lamented that his life was about to come to an end. *Suddenly Neelan tore away the trunk and head of the elephant and leapt into the sky. The Devas hailed the feat.* Before Neelan could descend, the headless elephant fell into the flood of blood which was already carrying many heads in its flow. Deprived of his mount, Pōrmattan, stood aloft in the sky with his crescent-moon-like bow. Neelan quickly hurled the sturdy tusks of the elephant (he had killed) at him. Pōrmattan cut these tusks to pieces with one arrow and shot another at the mountain-shouldered Neelan. Then he swiftly mounted another gigantic elephant and drove it as fast as wind and approached Neelan. The ferocious Neelan pushed Pōrmattan to the ground, in front of the elephant. Not realising that it was its master, the intoxicated elephant gored Pōrmattan with its ornamental tusks, kicked him with its legs, lifted him up with its trunk, and flung him down. Even then Pōrmattan did not die. Instead, he strangled his own elephant with his huge hands and became livid. *Seeing this, Neelan charged forward furiously, twisted the mighty hands of Pōrmattan, punched his chest hard and instantly killed him.*

Another Rākshasa known as Vayamattan entered the battlefield as if prompted by destiny for having led an evil life devoid of virtue. *His physique was bigger than a big*

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.lie and his shoulders were huge, humbling mountains. Cruel Vayamattan's greatest asset, however, was his archery. He boarded a chariot possessing many wheels and drawn by a thousand fiends. Accompanied by Rāvana's armies, he raised a great uproar, threatening the entire world. Even thunder trembled at the sight of him. Blustering Vayamattan filled the battlefield with a shower of arrows and drove away the monkeys. When no one came forward to face him, a vānara warrior known as Edaban volunteered. Looking at him, Vayamattan laughed sarcastically and said, "You are young. Defeating you and those like you, would be a waste. Even if Hanuman (considered as Brahma) faces me, I will not fight with him. I wish to fight only with Lakshmana who killed Atikāyan, the son of Rāvana." Unperturbed Edaban replied, "You are mad! Do not exhibit your valour by mere words. You only appear strong. Itching for a fight, you do not possess the remedy for it! You will see for yourself in a short while, the loss of your might." Vayamattan replied, "I asked you to go away out of pity. But you brag instead of running away. I shall therefore indulge in the sport of fighting with you." He then bent his golden bow and shot ten arrows at Edaban's chest. Though bleeding profusely, Edaban quickly threw Vayamattan's chariot off the ground (along with the fiends dragging it) towards the sea. Hanging in the air like a cluster of clouds, Vayamattan finally fell into the sea along with the chariot. His head and bow sank into the water. Even before he could rise up furiously and jump onto the land, Edaban who possessed rock-like shoulders asked him, "Where are you going to hide next, you sinner?" and advancing towards him with a roar, grappled with him like daylight embracing darkness, and tightened his grip. *Bleeding profusely from his cavernous mouth, Vayamattan lost his life and fell on the ground like a cloud with a rainbow.*

The fight between Sugreeva and Kumban added colour to the battlefield. They fought fiercely with trees and maces, moving a thousand times to the left and the right. Watching this, the Devas trembled. Sugreeva and Kumban resembling two mountains, fought like two lions, constantly wiping the profuse blood that oozed out of their torn bodies. With their eyes emitting fire, with their heroes' anklets jangling, moving hither and thither, they attacked each other fiercely. Kumban took a mace and swung it violently. Sugreeva pulled out a big tree and shielded himself with it, but the tree broke. Boiling with rage, he swore that he would kill Kumban. Even as he was thinking of a suitable weapon, Neelan gave him a mountain-like staff. *With it, he smashed Kumban's broad chest and shoulders. The Rākshasās shook with fear at the sight of Kumban falling down like a mountain. Before he could be taken for dead,*

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Kumban got up and dashed Sugreeva, declaring furiously that he would break his shoulders. Though Sugreeva for a moment felt a little weak, he immediately recovered, moved like an arrow, and gave the heroic Kumban a severe blow on his chest. The Devas gathered in large numbers to see who would win. Sugreeva and Kumban hit each other several times. The staffs in their hands were reduced to dust. Using their fists, they fought furiously like two rutting elephants. All the ten regions were filled with the deafening noise of their fight. Sugreeva, with his powerful fist, finally knocked the wicked Kumban down and tore his chest as if he was splitting a mountain! Kumban stood up and laughed, asking Sugreeva to continue the fight. *Like a five-headed serpent entering a serpent-hole, Sugreeva forced his hand into Kumban's mouth, plucked his tongue out and killed him.*

Another Rākshasa known as Nikumban, with his eyes emitting sparks of fire, arrived in the battlefield with great pride. Angry Angada stood before him. They were involved in a fierce fight the like of which had never been seen before. Nikumban took up a trident to attack Angada who appeared deadlier than the Hālāhala poison. Using a palmyrah tree and thwarting Nikumban, Angada was upon him appearing like a golden mountain perched over a blue mountain. Nikumban in the mean time lifted the trident and was about to throw it at Angada, when the capable Hanuman, realising that it was the right moment for him to intervene, arrived furiously on the scene. *With his handsome hand, Hanuman gave Nikumban a hard blow on the chest. Nikumban breathed his last, and the robust Māruti left the place.* With none to stop the vānara army, the Rākshasās ran helter-skelter in despair. More than a crore of them died as they stampeded towards Lanka's gateway. Some Rākshasās lost their lives asking for water due to intense thirst, the saliva from their tongues having dried up. Some wept bitterly and entered the city with their copious tears drenching the earth. Those Rākshasās who escaped, lost their lives by falling as if big mountains had fallen on the ground. The number of Rākshasās whose wounds were still fresh and who had fled in different directions, was countless. Several Rākshasās who appealed to their friends to remove the arrows stuck in their bodies, died while the arrows were being removed. Many Rākshasās managed to run to their wives and children, but could not be recognised by them as they were severely wounded. Some Rākshasās whose horses were killed in the battlefield did not know what to do next and stood trembling, while those who lost their elephants began walking. A few stood on the damaged chariots, like those staying on mountains destroyed by fire. Some of them, severely wounded, disguised themselves as monkeys and entered the

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battleground to save their lives. Unaware of this, other Rākshasās shouted that monkeys had infiltrated into their camp and killed them. Some of the Rākshasās opening their eyes in agony, asked those who were near by, to bring them water to quench their thirst, but lost their lives even before the water was brought. *Some died after drinking the water, while a few others died while sipping it! The fathers of some Rākshasās carried their wounded sons and when they died on the way, threw the corpses down and ran away to save their own lives. Some Rākshasās spewed blood, lost their eyes and died, unable to find their way.*

Despondent, the surviving Rākshasās entered the beautiful city of Lanka. When messengers rushed with torrential tears and fell at Rāvana's feet, he commanded them to tell him what happened. The messengers said, "Out of the huge army that you had sent to the battlefield, only an insignificant portion has returned alive. All your scions including Atikāyan have been killed." On hearing this, Rāvana sobbed in despair. He was gripped by waves of infinite shame, loss of self-respect and valour, self-pity, rising anger and grief, one after another. A sea of sorrow, he stood and gazed in all directions. He saw the jubilant Devas everywhere. He panted with a harsh fiery breath which burnt his whiskers. Thinking of his stupid lust for Seeta, he laughed, wept, became furious and was ashamed of himself. He wanted to kill everyone at once. He wanted to kill anything called a woman. Shame and despair engulfed him. None who stood near him spoke or breathed. All were depressed and frightened. At that time, his wife, Dāniyamali appeared before him weeping bitterly and wailing aloud. The jewels adorning her arms and neck clanged like thunder striking a mountain. She was beating her breast. Her mouth was like an open cave. Her red unkempt hair spread like the crimson sky over the peak of a mountain. Her eyes shed blood-red tears which looked like molten copper. Dāniyamali who had till then not seen anyone weep, fell at the feet of Rāvana, with her tender shoulders touching the ground. Drowned in a flood of agony, she sobbed and rolled like a serpent.

Crying aloud, she said, "Can you not destroy our mighty foes? Will you not release your suppressed heroism? Has the might of your shoulders declined? Do you not understand what I am telling you now, or do you not hear my pleadings? Will you not show me my dear son, Atikāyan? I was hailed by the celestials as the proud mother who had given birth to an illustrious son who could not be defeated even by Devendra. Now I have lost that son to an arrow shot by an ordinary man! First Akshakumāran died. Now Atikāyan is dead. All the mighty Rākshasās have been

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slain. Only Indrajit, the son of Mandōdhari, is still alive among your several sons. Can you, hereafter, achieve victories in all the regions? Can you bring back to life all those countless Rākshasās killed in the battle? Will the rest of those ignorant lustful Rākshasās be allowed to live? What about the sufferings that are yet to follow because of Seeta? Are they going to be any less? *You neither listened to the good advice of your brother, Kumbhakarna, nor did you follow the wise words of Vibheeshana. Having killed Kumbhakarna you have now sacrificed my son, Prince Atikāyan. And you still rule the kingdom!"* Grieving like a cow that had lost its calf, Dāniyamali raised her voice against Rāvana. The celestial dancers who were standing near by led her away to her palace. All the leading citizens of Lanka wept over the death of Atikāyan as if they had lost their own son. *The whole city of Lanka was immersed in grief in the same way in which people all over the world were immersed in sorrow when Rāma went to the forest leaving the unique palace of Dasaratha. The entire city of Lanka reverberated with the cries of the people. Their loud clamour was like the roaring of the sea on seeing the full moon!*

18. THE SERPENT NOOSE

The Rākshasis with their hair dishevelled gathered, embraced each other and beating their breasts, sobbed bitterly. Emerging like thunder coming out of the clouds, Indrajit arrived and wondered, "Has victorious Rāvana lost his pride because of another defeat, as had happened on the first day of the war? Has Rāvana died in the battle? Has Hanuman again burnt Lanka?" He was eager to know what transpired. No one answered him out of fear. Wanting to know the truth, he quickly drove his chariot to his father's abode. When he saw Rāvana (who had performed impossible deeds), he was partially relieved. Paying his respects to his father with folded hands, Indrajit asked him what had happened. Rāvana replied that, consumed by Yama, Atikāyan had gone to heaven along with Kumban and Nikumban.

Indrajit, an ace archer (the like of whom were few), bit his lips. His eyes emitted heat that could intensify even the sun's heat! He gazed at the sky in agony and asked, "Have all my brothers died? Who killed them?" The mighty Rāvana replied that it was the victorious Lakshmana who killed Atikāyan and the rest were killed by Hanuman and others, and explained in detail all that had happened. Indrajit said, "O king, knowing well the prowess of these men with their mighty army, you did not send me to fight them. My brothers have not been slain by enemies. It was you who gave them away to be killed and now we have lost our prestige." Immersed in deep thought and

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in utter fury, Indrajit heaved a fiery sigh and continued, "When I brought Hanuman before you (bound by the Brahmāstram), instead of killing him on the spot, you let him off saying he was a mere envoy. You failed to realise that the news of this place would easily reach our enemies. You are foolish. You have now lost the help of your sons. Even your life is ruined. What is the use of talking about past events? *I take a pledge here and now, that I will destroy Lakshmana who slew my brother, Atikāyan, in the battlefield. Till then I shall not step into this great city of Lanka.* If I do not make the earth drink the flood of blood from the body of Lakshmana who killed my invincible brother, Atikāyan, I will consider that I stand defeated, not once but four times, by Devendra who was vanquished by me long ago. I will completely annihilate the wild army of monkeys by cutting them into pieces. Should I fail to do all this, let me become the laughing-stock of the Devas who have all along been afraid to appear before me. Lord Siva has presented me with a divine sword, a dart in the form of a serpent and the Pāsupatam. If these do not prove useful to me today in my fight against Lakshmana, let me starve and die. If I fail to feed Yama with the life of Lakshmana, I shall cease to be the son of the great hero, Rāvana."

Rāvana replied, "Relieve me of my agony. Is there anything in this world that you cannot do? At a time like this when I grieve for my sons, I feel that only you can give me solace by attacking my enemies with your strong, well-bent bow." Paying his respects to Rāvana, Indrajit, the conqueror of the celestial world, covered his body with an impregnable suit of armour, tucked a sharp sword firmly at the side, tied a golden quiver to his back and took a sturdy bow in his hand. Indrajit's bow was originally made by Lord Brahma for Devendra. Indrajit had snatched it from him. The quiver on Indrajit's shoulders had also belonged to Devendra from whom he had wrested it after his victory. Even if the seven seas went dry, this quiver (which was like a fiend's den) would be full of arrows. Indrajit took crores of war-weapons with him; including those left by the defeated Devas and the ones presented to him by Lord Siva and Lord Brahma. Indrajit's divine chariot resembling another city of Lanka, was drawn by six thousand mighty lions. It had the exquisite record of chasing the celestial golden bird Garuda (Lord Tirumāl's mount) and the fast-moving Bull (Lord Siva's mount)! This chariot, by putting others to flight, had only met with success in all the three worlds. Looking at it, the fiends danced ecstatically. They shouted that Indrajit who had the fame of defeating Devendra, had now come to the battlefield. These dancing fiends hoisted their huge flags on Indrajit's chariot which had the unique distinction of having run over the bodies of mighty enemies and wounded Devendra's

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back. Indrajit was so mighty, that he had only seen the backs of the fleeing Devas; never their faces. While proceeding in his chariot towards the battlefield, he made everyone comment, "There goes Indrajit who is eager to fight." *It is not possible for an ordinary person like me (Kamban) to reckon the size of the army that accompanied Indrajit. But still the great sage, Vālmeeki, well-versed in all the four Védas, states that it was of the order of forty vellams. Who else would be able to assess the strength of that army?*

With Pugaikannan (a Rākshasa possessing smoky eyes) and Māpakkan (an invincible Rākshasa) guarding the beautiful wheels of his huge chariot, with an illuminated royal white umbrella protecting him from above, with large conches raising a loud sound and many musical instruments roaring like the sea and frightening the foes, the great Indrajit entered the battlefield. With crores of chariots and well-trained elephants providing guard, innumerable horses following him and a large contingent of infantry marching in front, Indrajit entered the front. Lakshmana continued to wait in the battlefield expecting either Rāvana or Indrajit to come for a fight after learning of Atikāyan's death. When Indrajit arrived, Lakshmana asked Vibheeshana "Who is that coming towards us?" Vibheeshana replied, "O great one, it is Indrajit, the conqueror of Devendra. The battle will be fierce from now on. With an open mind, listen to what I say after deep thought. *O Lakshmana! Fame is the only ornament for you. It will be proper for you to take the assistance of Hanuman, Jāmbavan, Sugreeva, Angada, Neelan and other commanders and then go for a long battle. Devendra, supported by thousands of Devas and a vast army, had fought with Indrajit and was defeated. If Devendra is still alive, it is because of the nectar of immortality consumed by him! Scars caused by the rope tied by Indrajit, are visible on his mountain-like shoulders. Even Hanuman, when he had come to Lanka, was bound by the Brahmāstram shot by Indrajit. It is impossible to adequately describe Indrajit's mastery over the art of archery."* Lakshmana thanked Vibheeshana for enlightening him on the prowess of Indrajit.

The flare and weapons with which Indrajit came, made Yama shut his eyes in terror. Looking at Indrajit's appearance and courage, Hanuman leapt with concern, and came like the wind to protect Lakshmana. Even before that, Angada had reached the place. Lakshmana was surrounded on all sides by strong vānara heroes with sturdy shoulders. Sugreeva preceded him, while the vānara army (resembling the mighty ocean with conches) came along with him. *Though the armies of vānaras and*

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Rākshasās thought differently (because of their anger), they resembled two big oceans with roaring waves rising from two sides. Hoping that their eyes and minds would be useful that day, the Devas left their heavenly abode and poured in to watch the great battle. The armies on both sides fought closely and raised a loud clamour. *The deafening noise raised by the blowing of conches and the beating of drums, made the celestials (including Devendra) tremble with fear and shut their ears with their hands.* Shouts like 'Bend!' 'Catch!' 'Capture!' 'Throw them out!' 'Shoot arrows!' were frequently heard on both sides. These sounds and the twang of bows were thrice louder than the sound of thunder during pralaya. The armies on each side attacked, forcing the other to retreat. Hit by stones and wounded by trees, spears and arrows, warriors on both sides fell dead. Unable to bear their dead weight, the earth caved in. The vānaras attacked with curved clubs, iron chains and trees, killing many Rākshasās. Their headless trunks danced on the battleground. The Rākshasās in turn severed the heads of the vānaras. Their blood spurted like fountains. The bodies of such dead vānaras looked like big logs of wood burning after an outbreak of fire in a dense forest.

The vānaras grappled with the Rākshasās, broke their shoulders, kicked them, pushed them, bit their necks, dashed them forcibly against the ground, kneaded them, and finally roared in jubilation. The Rākshasās cut the legs of the vānaras with their swords, severed their heads, sundered their shoulders, cut their bodies into several pieces and threw them away, and finally rejoiced with a clamour. Roaming like Yamas, monkeys smashed the mountain like heads of Rākshasās, with trees! Several vānaras bit the necks of the Rākshasās and died along with them. Like violent thunder striking and destroying mountains, fighting bears attacked rutting elephants and broke their tusks. Mountainous monkeys leapt upon vicious elephants, horses, decorated chariots, swords, tips of bows and the heads of the Rākshasās. Hit by maces and swords, the monkeys were cut into pieces. The river of blood carried their carcasses (as if they were pieces of sandalwood), in its flow and emptied them into the sea. Crushed by the strong hands of Hanuman and dashed against the ground, horses with their manes, flags, bows, arrows, maces, spears, chariots and furious rutting elephants were all made shapeless. Attacked by Angada with trees, many chariots were destroyed. *Lord Yama entered the battlefield and searched with his hands for the lives which had escaped without feeding him.* In all visible regions, monkeys furiously destroyed tuskers, horses and chariots and threw them around in heaps. Sages who witnessed this, remarked that the war waged earlier between the Devas and the Rākshasās did

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not bear comparison with the present one. *The Rākshasās held their heads high and chased the despairing monkeys.* But the vānara commanders stood firmly and fought well. They tried in vain to stop the fleeing monkeys. *Neelan, however, stood in the battlefield like Lord Siva (shedding light and holding the Trident). Beside Neelan, stood Yama with his messengers and his noose! The furious vānara warrior known as Kumudan destroyed his enemies with great force and speed though he was not wind. He drowned his enemies though he was not water. He consumed his enemies in utter fury though he was not fire. Kumudan, thus had the characteristics of these elements. Yama who watched this, shivered with fear and said, "I have lost my prime position as the god of death!"*

A vānara warrior known as Edaban enjoyed throwing trees and rocks at enemies. Among the trees, the only ones spared by him were the big Marāmarams. Among the rocks, only the Kula hill was spared. The wise Jāmbavan declared, "Rākshasās with sword-like teeth, with their leaping horses, elephants, and chariots drawn by horses, will be dying in large numbers today, shedding blood as profusely as water flowing from tanks. We need fear no more." The Devas roared jubilantly when Jāmbavan swung a big tree with a number of branches. Panasan, a vānara warrior resembling the Mandara mountain, penetrated the Rākshasa army and 'churned' it. He forced the fighting horses (resembling tidal waves), golden chariots (resembling ships) and rogue elephants (resembling whales) to retreat. Two vānara warriors known as Mayindan and Tumindan fought like the vulture kings, Sampāti and Jatāyu. Gavayan, a vānara warrior resembling an elephant stirring water in a pool, caused a great uproar in the battlefield. Another vānara, known as Kesari, waged a fierce battle without moving his feet. The reputed commanders of the vānara army stood in their respective places and fought with a clamour, creating heaps of Rākshasa corpses. The vānaras who had run away, returned and fought. The Rākshasā army got destabilised, and Indrajit had to fight the vānaras single-handed. The mighty Indrajit, with his ornaments shedding lustre, his mountain-like shoulders rising high on both sides, his fingers resembling sturdy pillars with battle-scars, twanged his bow and made the world tremble with fear. Looking like a lion, and roaring like the sea, Indrajit told his charioteer to penetrate deep into the enemy camp. *Humbling thunder, he shot ferocious darts like the deadly venomous serpents known as Sangapālan and Gulikan,* frightening Angada and other vānaras. The strong mountains and robust trees which the vānaras hurled at Indrajit, were burnt to ashes by his fiery arrows and sprinkled on the ground. His swift, powerful arrows pierced the mountains held by the vānaras and also their

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chests. After remaining motionless for some time, these vānaras, dragged by their fury, went close to Indrajit, who, however, pierced their chests with arrows which came out through their backs.

Within a muhurtam (an hour and a half), a vellam vānaras were cut into pieces and killed. Other vānaras who saw this rose up carrying mountains in their iron-like hands to hurl at Indrajit. Though these vānaras were severed by his arrows, they hurled the mountains at him, fell on him and died. Indrajit's sharp, swift arrows sundered the heads of other vānaras and carried them into the Nāga world, like the rays of the sun entering the crevices of the earth and like fierce snakes entering snake-holes. *During such attacks, if the monkeys opened their eyes to see, the arrows would pass through their eyes. If they stood up to oppose, the arrows would hit their chests. If they ran away scared, the arrows would pierce their backs. It they moved hither and thither, the arrows would attack them all over. If they leapt, they would attack their legs. If they waved their hands, they would attack their hands. If they shouted, they would pierce their tongues. If they ever thought of the arrows, they would even enter their minds!* Indrajit's shower of arrows made it impossible for the Devas to see what was happening in the battlefield. They could only hear the twang of the bow. They were sad to see the monkeys running away shouting that their large robust army had been annihilated!

The treacherous Indrajit saw crores of monkeys being cut into pieces. He stopped shooting his arrows only when there was no one to oppose him. Watching all this, Sugreeva came to the battlefield. Showing the fury of his charitable brother, Vāli (who had churned the ocean of milk and brought forth the nectar of immortality), and swinging the big Marāmaram he was carrying, Sugreeva approached Indrajit. *Seeing him destroying the Rākshasās, Indrajit was impressed and repeatedly lauded him.* However, he selected arrows deadlier than poison, shot two of them at Sugreeva's forehead, five into his chest, and pulverised the big tree held by him. Seeing all this, Hanuman became more virulent than Hālāhala poison! Slapping his shoulders, he entered the battlefield with a roar, and threw a mountain at Indrajit with such force that everyone around thought that he would be killed that very moment. However, Indrajit's arrows broke the mountain into bits. Addressing Hanuman, Indrajit said, "Hey you, wait! I have come to the battlefield thinking of you. How dare you boast of your prowess and stay alive without even touching the bow! Do you think your big trees and stones can equal my strength?" Mountain-shouldered Hanuman replied,

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"You weakling! We have with us, a few who are capable of fighting with bows, and others who can fight with stones. You are certain to see them either today or tomorrow. Defeated by you, Devendra and others might have run away to save their lives. We are not like them to be defeated in the battlefield and bite grass! We are confronting you with novel methods of warfare. Will you fight with me, or my leader, Lakshmana, or with my noble Lord Rāma who will soon be severing the head of your father Rāvana? We will respect your choice."

Indrajit shot back, "Where is that 'great' fellow who slew leonine Atikāyan? Where is Lakshmana who has preserved his life only to lose it at my hands? I have come here to slay him and mitigate my anger. Do you think my shower of arrows which can make the world tremble can be contained by your meagre prowess? Standing alone on my unique chariot, I will sever all your heads with my arrows. All of you may jointly fight me. Ask everyone in heaven and earth to help you. I will achieve victory in a single day between dawn and dusk and will not leave the battlefield till then." Indrajit then shot nine hundred arrows at Hanuman and pierced his body. The brave Hanuman stood patiently like a rock. He ground his bright teeth. He became furious. Plucking a nearby mountain that had given protection to many, and holding it aloft, Hanuman said, "Even a thousand elephants cannot vanquish an angry lion. If you harass me without waiting patiently for the arrival of my leader, Lakshmana, I will throw this mountain at you and squeeze your life out before your arrows reach me. You had better protect yourself with the prowess of your archery." With the hands that had trained many in warfare, Hanuman hurled the mountain. It struck the chest of sturdy-shouldered Indrajit like a stone hitting a strong diamond-like mountain and was smashed into smithereens. With fury, Indrajit shot a thousand arrows at the mighty-shouldered Hanuman who stood helpless with blood flowing from his body resembling the golden Meru which 'shivered' inwardly when attacked by a fierce storm. Before Hanuman could regain his composure, the fierce-eyed Neelan came, pulled out a big blue mountain with his long sturdy hands and hurled it at Indrajit. The mountain which came hurtling towards him like Yama's trident, was instantly split into several pieces by Indrajit's arrow. Neelan's body (three times as strong as the Meru) was like a sieve with blood flowing profusely, through the numerous holes created by Indrajit's sharp arrows which were like serpents in their cruelty, and frightened even Agni! Whenever the arrows were shot, the mighty Neelan trembled!

Angada in the mean time, dug up many huge mountains and hurled them at Indrajit's chest and shoulders. These mountains could neither reach Indrajit nor

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survive the attack of his arrows. They were all reduced to dust! Like serpents entering serpent-holes, Indrajit's fiery arrows entered the forehead, mighty shoulders, broad chest and erect legs of Angada. As these arrows attacked him ceaselessly, Angada trembled, ground his teeth and wrung his hands in deep anguish not knowing what to do. With his eyes flashing fire in helpless fury, with blood flowing profusely from his wounded body, Angada fell unconscious. A large number of vānaras were killed. Those that survived, ran helter-skelter in all directions. Looking at this, Lakshmana's eyes sparked! He told Vibheeshana, "Our strategy has failed. All the great commanders of our army are floating in a flood of blood. Innumerable lives have been lost. Should I not have fought with Indrajit and slain him? Have we not erred in deputing our commanders to oppose him?" *Vibheeshana replied, "What you say is true. Long ago, one thousand crore celestials came to fight with Indrajit. All of them lost their might and ran away, unable to harm him. Unless you kill Indrajit, there is no chance for anyone to survive."*

Lakshmana advanced with his bow like a golden cloud appearing with a rainbow. Looking at him, Indrajit asked his spy, "Is this the great younger brother of Bharata's elder brother, Rāma?" The spy said, "yes". The Rākshasa commanders told Lakshmana, "You who killed our king's son, Atikāyan! You are caught in our midst. Now where are you going to escape?" A hundred crore Rākshasās, assisted by sturdy chariots with flags hoisted on them, surrounded Lakshmana with a loud clamour. Lakshmana who was blessed by Rāma's sacred feet, slew all of them and earned for himself the garland of victory. The seven worlds trembled at the speed of Lakshmana's arrows. Mountains were reduced to dust. Many places in the earth cracked. Several heads rolled on the heaps of corpses and blood flowed profusely. Looking at this, the hands of the Devas shook with fear. Countless deadly arrows shot by the heroic Lakshmana pierced the chests of the omnipresent Rākshasās, scorched their flags, pulled down their cavalry and killed the elephants with their huge trunks. The Devas who tried to count the innumerable Rākshasās killed, failed, and only strained their eyes. Watching the inability of the Rākshasās to get away from Lakshmana's shower of arrows, the Devas wondered whether the seven types of clouds had learnt the art of showering rain only after watching Lakshmana's archery! All the elephants which fell dead, bore the tips of Lakshmana's arrows and appeared like a series of mountains. *In that battlefield, where heroic warriors were fighting like lions, the number of scorching arrows shot by Lakshmana were equal to the number of sand particles in the roaring sea! As Lakshmana's arrows had a long reach and were capable of consuming flesh, they looked*

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like birds with feathers and settled like vultures on the Rākshasa corpses. After the Rākshasās (who lost everything) ran away, Indrajit stood alone, like a solitary mountain in a dry sea. His eyebrows arched with fury. Racing in a chariot which moved as fast as his mind, he reached Lakshmana. Hanuman, too, arrived at the place. Paying obeisance to Lakshmana, Hanuman requested him to get onto his shoulders to fight with Indrajit! The leonine Lakshmana agreed and sat on Hanuman's shoulders. On seeing this the Devas roared jubilantly.

Lakshmana and Indrajit clashed like two clouds. They fought so fiercely with their arrows that in the task of destroying enemies they were like Kāli, in the art of slaying they were like Yama, and in their fury they were more scorching than fire! Their bows thundered, stunning the regions. The mountains cracked. The sky was torn. The world was reduced to dust with sparks of fire flashing all over. The arrows stuck to each other with their sharp tips. Several arrows clashed and broke into pieces. Those that escaped, got burnt and fell down shedding sparks of fire. Seeing this, the Devas shuddered and lost their senses. The whole world trembled in agony. The universe was shaken like a ship in a stormy sea. The ancient city of Lanka started spinning as Indrajit's chariot and Hanuman carrying Lakshmana moved innumerable times from left to right in the course of their fight! The ubiquitous burning arrows of both made it impossible for the Devas to see them. Ignorant of what was happening at the front and wondering what Lakshmana and Indrajit were doing, the Devas exclaimed, "Whoever fought like this before? There has never been a fight like this, nor will there be one like it in the future. *Lakshmana and Indrajit are demonstrating their expertise in the art of handling the bow." The Devas concluded that the fight they were witnessing showed that the great art of archery had not one but several facets of glory. They said, "Their prowess in archery is boundless and is greater than even the sky. To see such a great fight again is impossible!"*

The sharp-toothed Indrajit shot crores of arrows. Lakshmana shattered all of them with an equal number of arrows. Indrajit then released arrows known as *Nāgāstram and Gangapatram.* These were intercepted by the same number of similar arrows by Lakshmana. Indrajit deployed arrows resembling the crescent moon, which also met with the same fate. One crore each of sharp-tipped arrows resembling thorny grass, fierce arrows possessing the shape of a pointed fish, and arrows in the shape of diamonds and lotus buds, were all destroyed by similar arrows. Lakshmana also shot crores of arrows shaped like tridents and elephants' ears, which were destroyed by the same number of

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similar arrows. These two were thus engaged in attacks and counter-attacks with various kinds of arrows in very large numbers, which were all destroyed by one another. The world as well as the roaring sea were densely filled with arrows. Watching the war from the sky, the Devas turned their faces away, commenting that Indrajit had overtaken Lakshmana in the art of fighting. Seeing blood flowing from the broad shoulders of Hanuman, like a stream flowing from a mountain full of stones, the sages were frightened and exclaimed, "Indrajit alone is great in archery." Lakshmana the great archer shot hundreds of arrows which slew the lions with flowing manes drawing Indrajit's chariot, and tore the flags hoisted on it. Lakshmana also shot six hundred arrows to pierce Indrajit's golden armour which appeared like the sun in the midst of a dark cloud. Lakshmana's arrows drew profuse blood from all parts of Indrajit's body and killed his charioteer. Still these arrows neither had any impact on Indrajit, nor caused him agony. They, however, prompted him to say, "If this man who is fighting here is not Lakshmana, he could only be Nārāyana. If he is not even He, this man can only be compared to Lord Siva and Lord Brahma. *None among mortal kings can equal this master in archery who has come to our city!"*

Indrajit who would not give up fighting even when his life was in danger, spat fire from his mouth. Bleeding profusely, he flared up like fire fed with ghee. In the twinkling of an eye, he boarded another chariot drawn by a thousand horses. Raising a clamour, he shot billions of lethal arrows, frightening even Lord Siva. The impeccable Lakshmana destroyed all of them to the astonishment of those who saw the fight. He also shot over a thousand arrows at Indrajit. *The cruel and furious Indrajit replied with a hundred scorching arrows all in a bunch, hitting Lakshmana's forehead. Still, Lakshmana did not show any pain. In turn, he shot one hundred fierce arrows at the graceful chest of Indrajit, who had never been vanquished, and caused profuse bleeding. Indrajit became thoroughly exhausted. He rested his bow against the chariot and stood motionless till he got over his fatigue.* Another Yama, Hanuman, suddenly kicked Indrajit's chariot. Its gem-set golden wheels along with the axle crashed, killing the thousand horses drawing it. Boarding another chariot studded with precious gems and drawn by a thousand fiends, Indrajit shot fifty fiery, lustrous arrows at Lakshmana's shoulders. Undeterred, Lakshmana continued the destruction of cruel Indrajit's chariots, one after another. Thousands of chariots boarded by Indrajit were destroyed by six crore fierce arrows shot by Lakshmana. The Devas blessed him, gave him an ovation, showered the choicest flowers on him and happily waved their robes in the air along with their upper garments!

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A hundred thousand savage warriors came to the front and stood beside Indrajit only to get killed. They were in chariots, on horses and on innumerable dark elephants with red dots on their faces. They all thundered like the clouds. They wore garlands with jingling bells. Their voices resembled the boom of huge drums. The firmament resounded with the din made by these Rākshasās and the loud noise from the weapons that filled the battlefield. The yālis, lions, fiends, horses and even arrows roared loudly. A swift chariot drawn by wild lions, came to Indrajit for his use. Indrajit boarded it and showered arrows in all directions. Lakshmana, resembling the evening sky, neutralised them with a single arrow. The Rākshasās surrounded Lakshmana and attacked him with different weapons. These were cut into pieces by him. *Severed by Lakshmana's solitary arrow, thousands of Rākshasa heads rolled. The vast battlefield looked like a sea, and the bowels of the Rākshasa warriors lying on the battleground, like crawling snakes.* The carcasses of rutting elephants fallen on the ground looked like mountains. Clusters of chariots were demolished and strewn all over. A multitude of warriors holding various weapons were lying dead on the ground. Cut into innumerable fragments by Lakshmana's arrows, ear-rings, pearls, gem-set chains, necklaces, heroes' anklets, shields and several ornaments which had adorned the Rākshasās, fell down like stars from the sky! Lakshmana, with his arrows, completely screened Indrajit and created a mountainous heap of Rākshasa heads.

Yama, in the guise of Hanuman who was carrying Lakshmana, caught the Rākshasās firmly with his tail, threw them upwards and blew them like dust. He trampled them, pushed them, knocked them, kicked them and harassed them ceaselessly. *The huge elephant known as Hanuman* who was carrying Lakshmana, stared fiercely, threatened his foes, blustered loudly, threw angry elephants into the sea and filled it up, roared aloud, slapped his shoulders and dragged a thousand chariots with his graceful hands. Carrying Lakshmana, *the lion known as Hanuman*, lifted horses, elephants and infantry as easily as if he were carrying flowers, water, or tender plants, and kneaded all of them before flinging them away. *The great horse known as Hanuman* playfuly knocked down a thousand chariots with sturdy wheels drawn by serpents. *Enthused by Hanuman, the mighty vānaras who had fallen unconscious earlier, regained their senses and got up like those who had consumed poison getting back their lives because of suitable medication!* On awakening, the vānara warriors became furious. Their eyes flashed fire and they surrounded Lakshmana as if to protect him. They destroyed the Rākshasās by hurling hundreds and thousands of mountains and trees at them. Even the chariots adorned with jingling bells were

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damaged and stood like unfinished chariots in the workshops of artisans.

Angada uprooted a big mountain and told Indrajit, "This mountain will consume your life. Save yourself if you can." Then, rising into the air, Angada hurled the mountain with great force smashing Indrajit's chariot. The Devas rejoiced and danced in ecstasy, commenting that Angada had restored to his grandfather, Devendra (Vālis father), the prestige he had lost to Indrajit long ago. Giving up the destroyed chariot, Indrajit rose into the sky. He shot innumerable arrows at Angada and told him, "Leave your sweet life as prey to my arrows and go." As Indrajit advanced, he was surrounded by vānara warriors. They made his fierce arrows ineffective by hurling trees, heads of slain Rākshasās, chariots, horses and the trunks of mighty elephants at him. *Lakshmana who had sacrificed his royal comforts and his sleep, swiftly annihilated thousands of Rākshasās with his fierce arrows.* The sea of blood dragged in its flow the vast noisy army of Rākshasās and also the chariot of Indrajit. To prevent this, two Rākshasās named Pugaikannan and Māpakkan stood by the wheels of Indrajit's beautiful chariot. Looking at the bright faces of these two Rākshasās, Indrajit said, "The achievement of that great archer Lakshmana, who slew our entire army of forty crores, is remarkable." The two Rākshasās, however, wanted to encourage Indrajit. They replied, "You have also killed forty crore vānara warriors with your arrows. Your achievement is no less than that of his."

Indrajit and Lakshmana now came face to face. Lakshmana with the complexion of the red sky, shot thousands of arrows. These were reduced to powder by the arrows of Indrajit the conqueror of the Devas. Shooting them in bunches of sixes, sevens, fifties, sixties, hundreds and thousands, Indrajit made the surging vānara warriors unconscious and shot them again when they regained consciousness. While Sugreeva and the others guarding Lakshmana were tired, Lakshmana shot a series of scorching arrows (like a raging fire in a bamboo forest) at Indrajit, who now became weak and was in agony. Pugaikannan and Māpakkan standing by the side of Indrajit like the branches of a tree, rose in anger to fight with Lakshmana who was annihilating countless Rākshasās in the army. Except these two, no one who could be called a Rākshasa, was alive in the battlefield. A few survivors who had fled, became thirsty. They went in search of water with dry tongues and came across moist clouds. They drank water from them with cupped hands. A few Rākshasās died of excessive water falling on their raw wounds, while some others unable to get water died of thirst. The Rākshasās who managed to survive, though pierced by arrows, sped towards their

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city. Embracing their wives who came forward with dishevelled and flowing hair, these Rākshasās lost their lives and reached the heroes' heaven.

Some of the Rākshasās whose chests were pierced by fiery arrows, left the front and reached their abodes where they were stopped by their offspring who clung to their legs. Asking their kith and kin to look after them, these Rākshasās looked at their children's faces with great love. But seeing Yama approach, they slowly gave up their lives. Some of the wounded Rākshasās died after telling their friends, "If this is the valour of Lakshmana, the city of Lanka will certainly perish in half a second. Even before Indrajit is slain, escape from here and hide yourselves in forests and mountains." Lakshmana's arrows pierced the vital parts of the mountain-like bodies of some Rākshasās and consumed their lives. They felt they would die instantly if they pulled out these arrows. Like the state of soured milk, their minds were in turmoil. As good beings, they observed silence though they were in agony. A few Rākshasās avoided getting into chariots. A few avoided mounting horses. A few avoided sitting on top of the cloud-like elephants with red eyes. A few avoided even walking. Some Rākshasās did not go back to the heavily-guarded city of Lanka out of shame, while some did not go to fight out of love for their lives. They all stood trembling in the battlefield.

Lakshmana, like a big cloud showering a continuous downpour of rain, quickly moved close to Indrajit and noticed the latter's fatigue. Vowing to kill Indrajit, angry Lakshmana instantly took a fierce deadly arrow and severed his armour. Unable to protect himself, Indrajit lost consciousness. Pugaikannan and Māpakkan, instantly moved their chariot and declared angrily that they would end the war that very day. They shot crimson arrows, aimed at the shoulders and chest of Hanuman and Lakshmana. The latter, however, destroyed their bows, shattered their chariot along with its axle, killed the horses that drew the chariot and slew the charioteer. The two Rākshasās using steel maces with ornamental knobs, suddenly hit Hanuman like thunder. *When Hanuman snatched the maces from them, they feared that he might kill them with those very maces. Instead of standing by the master who fed them, the two Rākshasās ran away from the battlefield.* The vānara warriors, who had fallen unconscious due to Indrajit's virulent attack, regained their senses thanks to the cool breeze that blew. Yama not having set them as his targets, the time for their revival had come! The vānaras, including Angada, Kumudan, Neelan, Jāmbavan, Sugreeva, flawless Mayindan and his brother Tumindan, Satavali and Panasan, looking like lions, hurled mountains resembling thunderbolts at the Rākshasās and roared like

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thunderous rain. By then Indrajit regained consciousness. Holding a beautiful bow in his hand, he smiled at the feeble enemy attack and sundered all the mountains into several pieces. The vānaras again hurled mountains and trees and advanced towards Indrajit who stood all alone with only his will-power, bow and arrows to help him. As if taking pity on this nocturnal adventurer (Indrajit), the sun set behind the western mountain. *Darkness pervaded all the regions like the profound darkness found in the minds of fools who do not realise that the four everlasting Védas, the doctrine of Manu and other spiritual texts, penance, truth and all the divine benefits that the sages aspire for, are Lord Mahāvishnu Himself!* At this stage, Vibheeshana told Lakshmana, "O great hero attacking enemies like a serpent! Unless you kill Indrajit within the next six minutes, he will not die. The arrival of night will suit the fierce Rākshasās who indulge in sorcery. If Indrajit traverses the sky now, he will surely win." Fighting magnificently, Indrajit showered crores of arrows on the vānara warriors and the virile Hanuman. The divine darts shot by Lakshmana, to kill Indrajit, destroyed his chariot. Even before it collapsed, Indrajit thought of a new strategy and reached the sky with his bow. He decided to shoot the serpent noose (Nāgapāsam) and bind Lakshmana and his troops with it so that they would fall on the ground, lose their lives and be prevented from escaping alive.

Indrajit had so far fought with great valour and was equal in prowess to Lakshmana with his lustrous golden physique. Watching Indrajit choosing to fight from the celestial region instead of the terrestrial one, the Devas became nervous and fled. Holding a bow, with a quiver on his back, Indrajit, the leader of the wicked and a master of deception, went over to the darkest spot in the cluster of clouds. *As a result of the boundless penance and the virtuous deeds done by him in the past, owing to the divine boons secured from Lord Brahma and other gods, consequent to his Rākshasa characteristics and also due to the magical powers acquired through Mantrās, Indrajit reduced his body to the size of a speck. The Nāgapāsam, when shot, would not spare even the Trinity of Gods. Chanting the name of this exceptional dart in his mind, Indrajit took it in his hand.* The vānara warriors not realising the deception of Indrajit, roared jubilantly, remarking that Indrajit was hiding in the sky afraid of the fight. Lakshmana also thought likewise and laughed. Unaware of what was actually happening, Lakshmana got down from Hanuman's shoulders, handed over his victorious bow to Angada, and one after another removed the arrows which had pierced his body. It was then that Indrajit shot the powerful Nāgapāsam which dispelled darkness in all the ten directions and tightly bound Lakshmana's sturdy tall mountain-like shoulders, making him suffer intensely.

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When the Nāgapāsam bound him, Lakshmana did not realise that it was all the deceptive deed of Indrajit. Not knowing what to do, he became dejected and weak. He stared at the battlefield filled with headless trunks and then again at the sky. The sharp-toothed serpents released from the Nāgapāsam, bound all the vānara warriors so tightly and fiercely that all of them shouted aloud in acute pain, though their minds were firm. They did not know what to do. Hanuman became furious and declared that he would go to the sky and catch the stealthy Indrajit in a moment. *As Hanuman was uttering these words, he, too, was bound along with his mighty shoulders by the Nāgapāsam, in the same manner in which Rāvana was once bound by the tail of Vāli!* The vānara warriors bound by the Nāgapāsam would rise like mountains and fall at once, roll on the ground, raise their heads and look at the sky furiously with sparks of fire, thrash the ground with their tails, bite their lips, look at Lakshmana and fume inwardly at his pitiable condition. They looked at Vibheeshana's face and wanted to know if there was a way out! They were furious with the darkness which had made it impossible for them to see the Nāgapāsam approach them. They fell down with fear looking at the diminishing prowess of Lakshmana's shoulders and wondered who could relieve their suffering. They asked whether Hanuman had escaped from the onslaught! Looking at Lakshmana's predicament, they sobbed and wondered how Rāma would tolerate the sight! The strong Indrajit shot several arrows from the sky, like flashes of lightning. These arrows with golden tips, smoked and sparkled. They pierced the chests of those who faced them while they pierced the backs of those who retreated! Like the monsoon wind blowing strongly and dashing against the peaks of mountains and scattering the clouds away, Indrajit's fatal arrows attacked the rock-like shoulders of the vānara warriors destabilising them and making them fall to the ground, resulting in a profuse flow of blood. Anjana's son, leonine Hanuman with red eyes flashing fire, did not suffer any hardship despite his body being penetrated by billions of arrows. He, however, shivered at the agony of Lakshmana. The rest of the vānara warriors, pierced by hundreds and thousands of fierce arrows (harsher than thunder) fell with blood flowing from them like a river. Angada, however, remained tireless and strong even though he was severely wounded by countless arrows. Pierced by arrows, the truthful Sugreeva's body looked like a thorny shrub. Emitting sparks from his eyes, his mind was burning like a bamboo grove engulfed by fire. Seen in a hot flood of blood, Sugreeva resembled his father, the sun.

Lakshmana's body, bound by the harsh Nāgapāsam, was attacked severely by

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fierce arrows. *Like a great soul which realises the need to get rid of the bondage of a worldly life and yet perishes unable to sever that attachment, Lakshmana, though aware of the need to get out of his predicament, could not get rid of the effects of the Nāgapāsam and continued to suffer.* The arrows that pierced his body were like the rays of the sun, and the slow oozing of the blood looked like the sunlight which removes universal darkness. Lakshmana resembled the sun that had fallen on the earth from heaven after being caught by the planet Rāhu! Indrajit whose body was covered with Lakshmana's arrows, was in pain and bled profusely through the mouth. He thought, "I have done what I had planned. I shall complete the rest of the task after resting for a while." He was happy that he had achieved victory on two fronts. He had 'finished' Lakshmana and also the army of monkeys. With auspicious bells ringing his victory, Indrajit entered the palace of Rāvana after leaving the cloud-like Lakshmana. As Indrajit entered the palace, his shoulders were 'pierced' by the arrows shot from the black eyes of women with burgeoning breasts and smiling faces. Flawless women of the celestial world, holding ornamental golden lamps decorated with precious gems, received Indrajit. Crores of attractive women sang and blessed him by showering sacred grass on him. Meeting Rāvana, he told him all that had happened to their foes and made him happy. Indrajit said, "Please cast away your sorrow. No doubt my body is tired. I will soon get over it and tell you what to do next." He then went to his own palace to rest.

It grieved Vibheeshana to see the condition of Lakshmana and the others. He felt helpless. He was shaken like yoghurt churned by a churning-staff. He said, "Wicked Indrajit failed to kill me as he killed the rest. I, an ordinary being am still alive only due to my mental strength." Falling on the ground, he lamented loudly, "All those who loved Lakshmana have been bound by Nāgapāsam, whereas I stand free. What will the world think of me?" *Melting with agony and despair, and shedding profuse tears, Vibheeshana thought, "Those who love Rāma and Lakshmana might imagine, 'Posing as a friend, this Vibheeshana caused the slaying of Lakshmana by Indrajit!' Or they might say, 'Vibheeshana took over our army and made Indrajit win'. Or they might conclude, 'Vibheeshana surrendered to Rāma with a motive, a prelude to all that has happened now'.* The moment Indrajit entered the battlefield, I should have displayed my prowess by hitting him with my mace. I should have made him roll on the earth along with his chariot. I did not do so. Even after failing to defeat Indrajit, I have not been slain by him. I

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have become weak and pitiable. I am submerged in a deep sea of sorrow. To whom do I deserve to be related? I should have harassed the Rākshasās and helped the vānaras. I should have died or lived with them and shown my friends my open mind. Having failed to do this, I should have at least run away from the battlefield. Even that I have not done. *I am neither wanted by my opponents, nor am I wanted by this side whose protection I sought. I am like a stick burning at both ends."*

Vibheeshana's follower Analan saw him lamenting and said, "Is it proper for a wise one like you to be troubled as if you have no intelligence? Please be calm and remain here. I will convey the news to Rāma." Going up to the virtuous Rāma, and paying obeisance to him, Analan narrated all that happened. On hearing this, the thousand-named Rāma was drowned in an ocean of agony. Extremely distressed, he felt as though he were dead. He did not open his mouth and talk. He failed to realise his own existence. His eyes neither shed tears, nor saw anything. Though full of anger, he did not grind all the worlds with his hands, nor did he cry. *He remained alive only because he realised that Lakshmana was not dead.* The grief-stricken Rāma felt, "Nothing can be achieved by lamenting like this." He got up at once and sped to the battlefield, where his enemies had achieved victory by foul means. *The nocturnal blanket of darkness (resembling the black clouds rising from the ocean) treated the night as the proper time to 'crush' the tidal sea and all that was blue in colour.* Rāma selected the divine Agni-astram and shot it. The entire battlefield was illuminated with a flood of light as though the sun had reached its zenith. Rāma saw the mountain of corpses and the boiling sea of blood. The whole battleground resembled a world invaded by the sea during pralaya when Lord Siva, wearing an elephant's hide and holding a skull, would destroy all lives simultaneously!

In the battlefield which reeked of flesh, in the midst of huge mountains of corpses and a sea of blood with weapons lying on the ground, Rāma spotted his brother in a trice! Falling on him and sighing heavily, Rāma embraced Lakshmana's body. Those who saw them, commented, "Rāma will not survive this." Shedding torrential tears, Rāma appeared like a blue cloud close to the sun in the sky. *Though 'born' in this world, Rāma never suffered from the infirmity of birth.* Still, Rāma was in agony. Heaving a hot sigh he appeared to melt, became exhausted, lost his senses and did not know what to do. He placed his hands on Lakshmana's nose

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and mouth to find out whether he was breathing, called his name aloud several times and wept bitterly wondering if Lakshmana would survive. The sorrowful Rāma caressed the feet and patted the thighs of Lakshmana, looked at his impeccable lotus eyes, felt happy that his heart was still beating, held him to his bosom, stared at the sky, placed him on the ground, and wondered whether the wily Indrajit, had left the battlefield. *Strong-shouldered Rāma looked at his bow, looked at the binding Nāgapāsam and the night that was still on. He stared at the Devas in the sky, declared that he would uproot the earth, bit his coral lips, thought of the advice of scholarly elders and finally looked at the arrow in his hand.* Rāma, the immeasurable Supreme Lord, saw the vānara heroes lying motionless on the ground and thought of the might of fate. He looked at his big fierce bow and his arrows. He commented, "Who else in this world would have suffered the humiliation that I have experienced? 'Fine' indeed is my agony!" The everlasting Rāma told Vibheeshana, "You did not inform me that a battle was going on between Indrajit and Lakshmana. You failed to fetch me at once to consume Indrajit's life along with his Nāgapāsam. Vibheeshana! You have let me down!"

Hearing Rāma's words, Vibheeshana wept bitterly and said, "I did not know that Indrajit would fight here. Even then I thought it would be wicked Indrajit who would be defeated. The present calamity is due to the divine dart of Nāgapāsam. Lakshmana who had achieved victory by severing the head of Atikāyan, stood in the battlefield expecting Rāvana to arrive. Instead, it was Indrajit who came along with an army of forty vellam warriors in a chariot drawn by a thousand lions. Owing to Indrajit's virulent attack, our army of vānaras perished, their commanders became immobile and fell unconscious. Indrajit fought mighty Lakshmana who was mounted on the shoulders of Hanuman. Lakshmana proved his prowess in archery by destroying the thousand chariots boarded by Indrajit one after the other, and wiping out the Rākshasa army of forty vellams like the sunlight clearing dewdrops. Shooting several arrows at Indrajit's chest, Lakshmana made it appear as though Indrajit would die immediately. With blood flowing profusely from all his wounds, Indrajit became weak and stood alone, with the carnivorous Rākshasās completely annihilated. I warned Lakshmana that if Indrajit were allowed to escape, he would resort to sorcery. Just then the sun set. Hiding himself in the sky, Indrajit shot the Nāgapāsam and tormented the army of vānaras. O lord, we have not done anything wrong. No one has lost his life here. If they are relieved from the bonds of Nāgapāsam, they will wake up, revived. Do you think vānara heroes will fall prey to these feeble arrows? Please do not grieve. Vice will never vanquish virtue."

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Rāma asked Vibheeshana, "Who is the Deva who gave the Nāgapāsam to Indrajit? What is its nature? How do we extricate the victims from it?" Vibheeshana replied, "O holder of the Disc, this Nāgapāsam was generated by the yāga performed by Lord Brahma in ancient times. Lord Siva obtained it from Lord Brahma and presented it to Indrajit as a reward for his penance. The might of this dart is equal to the pralaya thunder. It was this Nāgapāsam that bound the strong diamond-like shoulders of Devendra. It was with these serpents that Indrajit bound the shoulders of Hanuman when he came to Lanka. It is this same dart that denied the Devas the pleasure of ruling the celestial world. O wearer of a tulasi garland! Even Lord Brahma cannot loosen its grip, not to speak of mortals! This arrow will leave only after destroying the bodies and extracting the lives of those it has bound. There is no way out." Rāma asked Vibheeshana, "Should I wage war on the Devas who gave this Nāgapāsam to Indrajit? Or should I scorch and annihilate all the worlds, killing myself in the process? Or should I destroy Lanka and massacre the Rākshasās with their kith and kin? What should I do now? Please tell me. Whoever it may be, if the one who granted the boon to Indrajit, comes to the battlefield and is penitent, I will not be harsh on him. If not, I will burn the three worlds to ashes, like the three cities burnt by the scorching arrow of Lord Siva. *Dear Vibheeshana, after the death of my brother Lakshmana, what does it matter whether I get fame or blame? When I think of the great help rendered to me by the vānaras, how can I consider that the celestials or the terrestrials are better in any way than these vānaras who have trusted me?"*

After thinking about it for a while, however, Rāma said, "Because of the agony caused by one Indrajit here, it is not fair to destroy this fine world." Repeatedly expressing his grief and heaving a deep sigh, Rāma was like an elephant controlled by the elephant-goad known as the Védas! He stared again at the Nāgapāsam that bound the mountain-like shoulders of Lakshmana and decided, "If this dart kills Lakshmana, I, too, will die." The Devas who were watching everything from the sky, shuddered to think of the outcome. *Hovering around the Devas, was the great Garuda, the celestial eagle.* He saw that Rāma who had never lost his balance was now unnerved because of the Nāgapāsam. The ever-tranquil Garuda became sorrowful. He did not wish Rāma to mercilessly annihilate the world. Owing to his abounding love for Rāma, Garuda wanted to relieve him of his sufferings and slowly started moving. With the lustre of his body, Garuda could illuminate the earth. The rapid movement of his mighty feathers, as he flew, could produce such a powerful blast of wind that the

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discern you with clarity. Neither I, nor anyone else can fathom your great acts of *deception!* You do not aspire for anything. Yet, you fulfil the wishes of your devotees. To the sages who have conquered their five senses and to the celestials, you give heavenly bliss. Even the Trinity of Gods cannot comprehend you fully! Who can know your wonderful *deception?* You are unique in that you know the one who shot the Nāgapāsam, as well as the ones who are bound by that dart and also those who feel sorry for them. *You are part of that knowledge which eludes the ignorant. Yet, you are deeply attached to these ignorant ones!* You are the embodiment of philosophical knowledge! Who can know these great deceptions you practise? Possessing a thousand divine names, you are present in all the objects of the world. Without giving up your true nature, you have taken the incarnation of the fish, the tortoise and other creatures."

Garuda who opened his heart and spoke, flew fast, emitting a lustre which removed darkness. Rāma saw hot solar rays suddenly flashing everywhere. He raised his head to see what was happening. He saw Garuda flying in the air, waving his mighty wings which were capable of screening the seven worlds. Garuda descended and stood by his side before Rāma could even think. *Owing to the arrival of Garuda, the Nāgapāsam shot by Indrajit became as thin as the thread of a lotus stem and disappeared without a trace, like the hunger of those who go to Vennainallur and enjoy the hospitality of the charitable Sadayappan whose munificence is as bountiful as the clouds.* The flapping of Garuda's huge feathers removed darkness from the world. The scars on the bodies of Lakshmana and the others disappeared like the ephemeral effects of accusations flung on a righteous person! While the sinful Rākshasās did not revive, the virtuous vānaras came alive as if created afresh by Lord Brahma after pralaya. Lakshmana got up and prostrated himself before Rāma. Embracing Lakshmana, Rāma said, "God who had caused us agony which we had never experienced before, has now descended in the guise of Garuda to remove our grief." Rāma also embraced the other vānara warriors who were like his kith and kin. Going to Garuda who possessed claws like the crescent moon, Rāma said, "O lord, you came and saved us, in reward for our penance! Who are you? By coming here, you gave life to those bound by the Nāgapasam! We do not have the capacity to offer you anything in return to show our gratitude. O sea of mercy, is there any object greater than you to be studied and analysed by men of wisdom? Even before knowing who you are, your arrival here has restored our lives and has done us

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immense good. If only you tell us who you are, there is nothing that is difficult for us to attain! O benefactor who revived those who could not be declared dead or alive! You have neither seen us before, nor heard of us, nor were you obliged to us. *You seem to be one who gives.* Kindly tell us what we should do in return for the good you have done us." Garuda, the king of birds, replied, "O Supreme Lord and giver of heavenly bliss! O enemy to illusory life! I will come to you again at the end of your encounter with Rāvana. I will then reveal to you our relationship. Please permit me to take leave of you now." Saying so, Garuda flew away. Looking at Garuda, Rāma observed, "After restoring the lives of all those bound by the Nāgapāsam, Garuda has gone without receiving anything from us. *All compassionate ones act like this. They only give, not expecting any rewards. Does the world offer anything in return to the bountiful clouds?"* Hanuman intervened and said, "O protector of dharma, if we keep quiet, the Rākshasās will conclude that Lakshmana is dead and they will torment Seeta. Instead, if we raise a clamour, the Rākshasās who are asleep now unaware of the dangers facing them, will rise with concern that the dead vānaras have come back to life. Let us therefore raise a jubilant uproar." The great Rāma gave his approval, and the vānaras made such a din, that the earth surged upwards. The people of the world went into a panic not knowing the cause of the uproar. Clouds were scattered and mountains split.

Rāvana was engrossed in his thoughts of the impeccable, pristine, pure Seeta. In the process, he did not open his eyes and his body became warm. His chest which could not be pierced even by Lord Siva's spear was now torn by Manmatha's floral arrows. *Except for Seeta who languished constantly thinking of the virtuous and dutiful Rāma, and Rāvana who was always thinking of Seeta, everyone in that city of Lanka was fast asleep.* The thunderous uproar of the leonine vānaras, was heard by Rāvana. Realising that the furious vānara army had risen for war, he got up quickly from his bed. He commented, "Only the words of Indrajit assure us that the enemies are dead, but in reality it does not seem to be so." Rāvana clapped aloud and laughed, while his shoulders shook. He said to himself, "Rāma's belligerent bow raises a thunderous sound. The twang of Lakshmana's bow is so loud as to split the universe. Hanuman's loud clamour deafens my ears. Sugreeva's roar is all-pervading. Angada, too, raises a clamour. Neelan's roar is so loud as to touch the sky. The furious outbursts of other warriors pass beyond the universe. Our enemies, without a doubt, have been released from the Nāgapāsam." Rāvana got up from his bed. Accompanied by

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innumerable Rākshasās wielding swords and women wearing beautiful ear-rings and carrying ornamental lamps made of gold, Rāvana left his palace and reached Indrajit's. Rāvana was accompanied by women who possessed slim waists that humbled creepers, and burgeoning breasts that screened the sky. With dishevelled hair, these women held their slipping robes, sighed heavily with drowsy eyes, and walked with slow and unsteady steps, propelled by sweet music set to attractive tunes. They opened and closed their eyes often, and their ankle bells tinkled feebly.

As soon as the din created by the vānaras reached their ears, all the mighty Rākshasās trembled like elephants which had heard the roar of lions. The wives of the Rākshasās were also frightened like snakes exposed to the sound of thunder. Rāvana quickly entered the golden palace of his son, Indrajit, and saw him. With blood oozing profusely from the wounds inflicted by Lakshmana's arrows, Indrajit looked like an elephant which had lost its prowess to a lion. Unable to get up and pay obeisance to Rāvana, Indrajit did so with folded hands. A shocked Rāvana asked, "My son! You seem to be suffering from intense pain. What happened?" Indrajit, who was in agony, said, "O lord, the countless arrows shot by Lakshmana have pierced my chest and have drawn all the blood from my body, making it dry. My armour was also destroyed by his arrows. Fatigue makes my eyes close on their own. Had I not left the battlefield through sorcery, I would have been killed instantly. O possessor of mountainous shoulders, I had never experienced pain when I fought long battles with Devednra, Lord Siva or Lord Tirumāl. But the prowess of this lowly man, Lakshmana is boundless. We do not know the might of his brother, Rāma. Without realising the outcome of this war, you are still hopeful of victory. This is not right." Indrajit continued, "My victory over the monkey warriors and slaying them along with Lakshmana were solely due to Nāgapāsam and the use of māya. Rāma with great prowess is still there. Let the war continue as before!" Rāvana said, "O wearer of a hero's anklets, contrary to what you say, the twang of Lakshmana's bow rends the sky. The jubilant uproar of the monkeys subdues the noise of thunder and makes the sea shudder. Do you not hear any of these sounds?" Indrajit replied, "O lord, Lakshmana and the others were bound by the fierce Nāgapāsam. My thunderous arrows have pierced the chest of the vānaras and made them lifeless. I witnessed all this with my own eyes. You now say that all our enemies are alive. Is it true? Can the Nāgapāsam be destroyed by anybody? Our enemies cannot be helped even by the Devas, because they are inferior to us." When these two were talking, the spies who had gone to the battlefield returned to the palace and paid obeisance to Rāvana. He asked them to

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tell him what had happened there. The expert spies said, "Rāma came in the middle of the night, and saw all those bound by the Nāgapāsam and all others who were killed by arrows. He was visibly moved and wept. He became furious and asserted that he would scorch the entire world. At this stage Garuda came from the celestial world to relieve Rāma's anger. On seeing Garuda, all the sharp-toothed serpents perished. Our enemies, though wounded by arrows, woke up tireless. They have become more powerful than before. Assembling in the battlefield they have raised a great clamour. This is what happened."

Rāvana said, "The Nāgapāsam, shot by my renowned and mighty-shouldered son, has been removed from the bodies of our enemies by the lowly Garuda through the wind generated by the flapping of his wings! Look at this! If this is true, how 'great' indeed is the life led by this Rāvana! All my methods to destroy my foes seem to have becomes obsolete. Perhaps this Garuda had not seen Tirumāl (full of arrogance because He had consumed the fourteen worlds and brought them out) defeated by me, tremble and run away! I had destroyed the serpents protected by that Tirumāl, while this Garuda's chest, back, shoulders and wings were sewn by my arrows. Was it in such a condition that Garuda came to rescue my foes? Let us not worry about it now. O hero, let the unique battle continue to be fought by you. We will kill those who were slain by your arrows and revived by the flapping of Garuda's wings! When Garuda sees it he will feel ashamed." Indrajit replied, "Let this day pass. Let me be relieved of my fatigue. Tomorrow, I shall go to the front, use Lord Brahma's dart in a moment, and relieve you of your mental agony." Agreeing with Indrajit, Rāvana returned to his ornamental palace.

19. THE SLAYING OF THE ARMY COMMANDERS

The Rākshasās who heard the clamour at the front, got up angrily and were keen to go to war. Amid the beating of war-drums, they reached the palace of Rāvana and swarmed round him. Māpakkan and Pugaikannan requested Rāvana to permit them to go to battle. Rāvana happily agreed. But the messengers disapproved. They told Rāvana, "During the battle between Indrajit and Lakshmana, Indrajit's army consisting of elephants, horses, chariots and infantry, was completely destroyed. These two (Māpakkan and Pugaikannan) were unconcerned with the predicament of the solitary Indrajit. Afraid of Lakshmana's arrows, they fled from the battlefield. Such 'heroes' have now come forward to fight." The cruel Rāvana lost himself in utter rage. "Is this

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their heroism?" he asked, and ordered them to be imprisoned. Accordingly, they were caught by the attendants. Rāvana, however cautioned, "Do not kill them. Cut off their long noses and take them round the city. Announce by beat of drums that they are cowards." The attendants were intercepted by Māli who told Rāvana, "Renowned king, your words do not befit your status. Those who have retreated from a fierce battle could become successful later or die ! *O king, you have still not understood the uniqueness of this war. In previous wars, the Devas and the Asuras were totally vanquished by us. Even Devendra was afraid of us. Think of the present war. Varuna shivered with fear and finally paid homage to Rāma earning his grace.* Even the Devas are afraid of Rāma. How can the Rākshasās stand before him? They will run away. *Severing of noses is a punishment not given by sensible persons.* When forty vellam Rākshasās were killed in action, only Indrajit, Māpakkan and Pugaikannan have survived. The serpent noose that had tightly bound Lakshmana, has been severed. More than half of the Rākshasa forces, have since been destroyed. Even you had to return after a battle with them. Your son, Indrajit, too, could not achieve victory. How can you then cut off the noses of these two? On hearing the very name of Lakshmana, the Rākshasās shut the doors of their houses. *If you cut the noses of all these Rākshasās, they would occupy more space than the seven seas! If we decide to cut the noses of all cowards, such a task will extend beyond eternity. More than half of our army consists of those who were frightened and defeated by Hanuman, whom they finally worshipped. These survivors are still living with their noses intact! When it was decided not to release Seeta, many warriors took a brave pledge and entered the war. Who among them have since not fled? Can the noses of all those warriors be cut?"*

Realising that Rāvana's anger had abated, Māpakkan and Pugaikannan became bold. They told Rāvana, "O father, your son Indrajit left the front out of fatigue and reached the city of Lanka by deceptive means. You who can melt the enemies, like fire melts butter in a copper bowl kept on it! We will give up our lives in battle this morning or tomorrow. We will not allow a third day to elapse. After sending us to the front, you will either hear that we have laid down our lives in the fierce war or that we have slain our enemies." After the two Rākshasās took this mighty pledge, Rāvana sent ten vellam warriors carrying lustrous weapons and an adequate number of elephants, horses and chariots along with them. As directed by Rāvana, the enemy of yāgas known as Yāgasatru and the enemy of the sun known as Sooryasatru, Māli, the wearer of a hero's anklets and a Rākshasa known as Vajradantan possessing fierce teeth, closely followed Māpakkan and Pugaikannan. All of them collectively moved like a cluster of mountains. The dust that arose engulfed the sky. It was impossible for

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anyone to count even the warriors in one division! The chariots moving on wheels shed plenty of lustre. Elephants which appeared like mountains with legs, sported flags that resembled silver waves. Swords glistened like fish. *The whole army was like a vast ocean.*

In unison with the drums that boomed like the sea, the elephants trumpeted like thunder. The neighing of horses resembled the sound of rain. Rutting elephants marched with decorated face-plates. They extended their long trunks into the sky, sucked the water from the clouds and sprayed it all over. After satiating their thirst, some of the elephants continued their onward march. The dazzle of the various weapons and the glitter of the ornaments adorning the warriors, chariots, horses and elephants banished darkness from all the eight regions. Rāma, the universal Lord, saw the army, and asked Vibheeshana whether the commander (who appeared to be furious) was Indrajit who had won by sorcery. The fearless Vibheeshana replied, "The cloud-like Rākshasa coming forward with a bow and a sparkling quiver tied to his back, his roar reducing even thunder to powder, baring his crescent shaped teeth and looking like a furious lion, is Māpakkan. The one in the golden chariot, ejecting fire and licking the corner of his big mouth, is Pugaikannan. The mad one with a mountain-like physique, holding a trident, riding in a sturdy chariot, and shouting arrogantly is Vajradantan. The one with the closed mouth, on that horse with a white mane, galloping faster than the wind and the mind is Pisāsan. The other one roaring louder than the sea, more furious than fire and standing in the golden chariot, is Sooryasatru. That one, with eyes flashing fire and shedding blood, is Yāgasatru. The one you see there, in a chariot accompanied by the cavalry, possessing boons secured through performing fierce yāgas, frightening even Lord Siva, is Māli."

Extolling Rāma, the vānara army, roaring like the sea, opposed the Rākshasa army. Both armies fought with equal prowess. The Devas who witnessed this fight, began to sweat. The vānaras hurled a volley of stones which thundered like clouds. They were countered with a volley of arrows. Like thunder falling from the clouds, the teeth of the monkeys fell down, and their heads rolled down like mountains. The stones hurled by the vānaras killed the rogue elephants and bridled horses, broke the rapidly moving chariots and slew the Rākshasās, as if they were knocking off Ādisesha's hoods. The discs hurled by the Rākshasās, carried with them the mighty heads, rock-like shoulders, long feet and raised tails of the monkeys, along with the rocks and trees held by them! Rākshasās riding excellent horses galloping faster than the mind and leaping over the regions, threw missiles called Tōmarams which pierced the

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bodies of the brave vānara commanders and also penetrated the ground! *Just as poverty-stricken family men die unable to feed others and themselves, the galloping horses collapsed because the axles of the golden chariots drawn by them were hit by fiery mountains.* Profusely bleeding fierce elephants, without their riders, moved along with the flags tied over them but failed to reach their destinations. *They appeared like ships with masts floating listlessly in the sea after their captains were slain by pirates.* Many horses whose riders were killed while holding weapons were caught in the sea of blood. These horses leapt and plunged into that flood, like the pralaya submarine fire, and vomited blood. The Rākshasis who came to the front could not identify their husbands though they had lived with them for long, because their huge heads with their fierce teeth, hit by the rocks hurled by the vānaras, had entered their bellies.

The smoky-eyed Pugaikannan fought with Hanuman. Angada fought with Māpakkan. Māli holding a sturdy bow, fought furiously with Neelan. Pisāsan fought with Panasan. Sooryasatru faced Sugreeva, the son of Soorya. Yāgasatru faced Lakshmana and Edaban was confronted by Vajaradantan. Out of the ten vellam Rākshasās who fought, six vellam were destroyed by the vānaras, and the rest were killed by Lakshmana's arrows. The flood of Rākshasa blood filled the salty sea and made it look like molten copper. The shoal of fishes which consumed flesh turned red. The entire sea with its ebullient waves appeared like blood, making all kinds of gems including the pearls from conches as well as the pearls falling from the foreheads of rogue elephants, look red. *As the great battle raged, Rāma (the sun) chased away darkness in the form of Rākshasās, while the sun rose with his red rays (as if rising after a dip in the flood of blood) and got rid of the external darkness!* There was brightness everywhere, as though two suns were protecting the world! With the complete removal of darkness, the tidal sea of blood and the mountain of elephants' carcasses mingled, while the mountains standing on the ground and the all-pervading sea appeared boundless and indestructible. Beetles, with dots and stripes over their bodies, emerging from the mire caused by the blood on the ground, swarmed round the faces of the dead in the early hours of the morning and appeared like lotus clusters blooming on seeing the morning sun. In that battlefield the slain elephants and horses lying together on the ground and the damaged chariots, looked as if they were a cluster of clouds and a cluster of stars and celestial chariots, all strewn on the earth by a pralaya wind.

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The Rākshasās' wives, with their faces resembling the full moon and with flaming red hair flowing around their red lips, entered the battlefield. The bodies of the dead Rākshasās, embraced by their wives, looked like trees encircled by creepers. The Rākshasis with slender waists and mountain-like breasts, long red hair and sharp teeth, who entered the battleground in search of the blood-splattered heads of their beloved husbands, saw these heads in the hands of fiends who refused to part with them because they had preserved them to eat. The Rākshasis caught hold of these fiends and tore their mouths. A Rākshasi saw her husband's body and limbs lying separately. Embracing these, she removed them to another place, when a jackal snatched the liver and bowels of her dead husband from her. Unable to follow the jackal, she heaved a sigh of despair and died. Some jackals dragged the arms of the dead Rākshasās. Their wives pleaded in vain with the jackals to part with these arms, and desperately followed them. While doing so, the legs of these women were cut by the weapons lying on the ground! The Rākshasis who roamed in search of their husbands on the mountainous heaps of corpses of warriors looked like graceful peahens moving about on the peaks of mountains in search of their mates. Some wives saw their renowned husbands lying dead on the ground with their lips folded inside their mouths in great rage. *These wives became angry, suspecting that their husbands had drawn in their lips to hide their amorous intentions.* Some Rākshasis, unable to identify the bodies stuck with arrows, removed them and died after seeing, again and again, their creeper-like nail-marks on their husbands' shoulders!

Huge, mighty-shouldered Hanuman and Pugaikannan, fought each other emitting fire. Equal in strength, neither of them retreated, nor won. Furious Pugaikannan, resembling a mass of black clouds, shot twenty-five fiery arrows at Hanuman. Possessing great prowess, and resembling the pralaya cloud, bleeding Hanuman destroyed Pugaikannan's chariot. Having lost his chariot, the latter rose with his bow into the sky only to have it broken by Lakshmana's fierce arrow. Immediately Hanuman pounced on mountainous Pugaikannan, embraced him, pulled him down to the earth, and kicked him with the mighty legs with which he had once crossed the huge sea. *After plucking out and throwing Pugaikannan's head, Hanuman relieved himself of his anger.* Māpakkan and Angada were involved in a furious battle. Their eyes turned red like flames of fire. Māpakkan who always fought from close quarters, shot fifty-one fierce arrows at Angada's shoulders, as if he were throwing earthen balls at a rogue-elephant tied to a post. With the complexion and fury of a dark cloud, Angada, resembling *Rāhu* and *Ketu*, lifted Māpakkan along with his chariot, dashed him to the ground and threw him away.

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Māpakkan cast away his bow, got down from his wrecked chariot which used to shine like the sun, and threw his unerring spear at Angada's sturdy chest. Fearing that this spear was another form of Yama's noose, Rāma destroyed it with a fierce dart. *Praising Rāma's valour, Angada, tore the blustering Māpakkan into halves.* The great Māli fought with the vānara warrior, Neelan. The Devas proclaimed that their fight was akin to the fight between Lord Narasimhamurti and Hiranyan. Neelan threw a rock which broke Māli's bow. Immediately, Māli challenged Neelan to a sword fight and stalled the latter's advance. As these two were engaged in a fierce duel, Kumudan, standing a little away, flung a mountain at Māli reducing his precious chariot to bits. Neelan, too, threw a mighty tree at Māli, who, with his sword, cut it into pieces. In the mean time, Lakshmana shot arrows at Māli, sundering his shoulders. Māli continued to fight. *Lakshmana, however, left the place in disgust commenting that it would be unfair to fight with one who had lost his arms. The heroes in the front, lauded Lakshmana for his fair fight.*

Lakshmana went to Yāgasatru, and with a bright arrow, broke his lustrous and fiery bow, split his wide chest, and relieved him of his shoulders, neck, legs and life as well. Sooryasatru was met by Sugreeva and was killed. Another vānara warrior, Edaban, was engaged in combat with Vajradantan. His fast-moving chariot, as well as his charioteer were destroyed by a rock hurled by Edaban. Dropping his bow, Vajradantan got down from the chariot, stood on the ground with his mace and hit Edaban grievously like thunder striking a mountain peak! Hanuman assumed a huge form and came there. Vajradantan wearing a hero's anklets, hit Hanuman's chest with the mace, raising sparks of fire. Using his left hand, Hanuman caught hold of Vajradantan and threw away his mace. *Then, with his mighty ever-victorious fists he knocked Vajradantan down, killing him on the spot.* Pisāsan, another Rākshasa, hurled a big tree at the chest of tiger-like Panasan, making him roll down with blood flowing from his body. None could make out whether Pisāsan, a great fighter who was riding a special horse, was in the clouds, or the sea, or the sun, or anywhere else! In that battlefield consisting of crores of horses with vultures encircling the sky, only one horse could be seen galloping and moving about! This was Pisāsan's mighty horse which never stepped on the ground. It galloped faster than the sight of the eye, the speed of the mind, and the wind blowing in the sky! Pisāsan hurled a spear which distressed the earth and killed several hundreds of vānaras. Looking at this, the Devas lost their courage. The brave Lakshmana felt that Pisāsan's real form was only one. Invoking Vāyu, he shot a dart which severed deadly Pisāsan's head. Riding the horse that galloped rhythmically, Pisāsan, even after losing his head, held a destructive

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trident in his hand and without falling on the ground, continued his task of killing for some time! *The bees hummed into the ears of Seeta, that something good would happen that day. The southern messengers of Yama carried the lives of those killed in war, to their city, while the messengers of the deceitful Rāvana reached Lanka. Paying obeisance to him, the messengers said, "What we are going to convey to you is something which will not make you jubilant." Then, they narrated to him with great agony how all their mighty heroes were killed at the front.*

20. THE SLAYING OF MAKARAKANNAN

The words of the messengers ringing in the ears of Rāvana made him sad. He heaved a deep sigh like a wild serpent and sobbed. Seeing his pitiable condition, Makarakannan, a Rākshasa standing near him, said, "O father, in an earlier encounter, Rāma snatched the life of my father Khara. You never sent me to fight Rāma. You do not seem to have realised my prowess. Why should you be unhappy when I am here? Though I wanted to go to the front, I did not do so because you did not ask me to go. O king, do you think I can be defeated by the sky, earth, or any other element? My widowed mother full of tears, is drowned in grief. She has taken a vow that she would perform the last rites of her dead husband only with the skull of her husband's killer for a vessel. She has therefore not removed her māngalyam. O holder of a spear that can feed the vultures! Please bless me and permit me to proceed to the front." Rāvana replied, "I allow you to go and settle your old score with your enemy." The wicked Makarakannan, who had mighty shoulders secured through penance and boons, took leave of Rāvana and left in a chariot, with a bow in his hand. The five crore army which accompanied him roared like an ocean. The dust raised screened even the Trikoota mountain. On Rāvana's direction, the two Rākshasās, Raktakannan and Singan, walked on either side of Makarakannan's mighty chariot drawn by horses. Happily proceeding with all the four divisions of the army, Makarakannan was like the moon encircled by stars.

The elephants trumpeted and the horses neighed aloud. The sound emanating from the leather drums reached the boundaries of the universe. With no space even for air to enter, all living beings started sweating profusely. The commanders of the armies of the two sides fought valiantly. After engaging themselves in fist fighting, the armies exchanged stones and arrows. The blood that flowed profusely swept away even the elephants. The rocks thrown by the vānara warriors were intercepted and hurled back

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at them by the Rākshasās. As if hit by thunder, hordes of monkeys died, providing food for jubilant demons. The vānara warriors snatched the swords from the hands of the black–complexioned Rākshasās and killed them, while the Rākshasa warriors snatched the stones and trees from the hands of the vānaras and killed them! Makarakannan, the great destroyer of the vānara army, with a garland and a golden chain on his chest, with fish-like eyes and the prowess of thunder, drove his huge, victorious, golden-wheeled chariot towards the cloud-like Rāma hailing from the fertile land of Kosala. Looking at the handsome-shouldered Rāma, Makarakannan said, "You consumed the sweet life of my father. My enmity towards you has been at a low ebb as we did not meet. On seeing you today, my hatred for you has risen again." Listening to the cruel Makarakannan's words, Rāma replied, "Are you the son of Khara? Have you come to avenge the death of you father? It is of course the duty of a son to do so. You have spoken rightly."

Twanging his bow and looking at Rāma, Makarakannan said, "I will finish my fight with you, get rid of my anger and attain peace." Like the torrential rain from dark clouds falling on a mountain with lofty peaks, Makarakannan showered arrows. He shot a thousand arrows at the neck of Rāma, two thousand arrows at the armour of Lakshmana, several arrows at Hanuman who was engaged in a fierce battle, and innumerable arrows to cover the entire celestial world. Rāma's lustrous and scorching arrows cut all of them into pieces. Rāma then shot a fiery arrow that pierced Makarakannan's chest. With his eyebrows arched, and his eyes appearing like sunflowers, Makarakannan suffering from pain, raised a clamour and spat smoke from his mouth. He shot back a thousand strong diamond-like arrows at Rāma's armour, and baffled even the celestials. Rāma smiled. With six choice arrows, he removed the hooves of the horses drawing Makarakannan's chariot, broke his bow, and knocked down the head of his charioteer! Blessed with a unique prowess through rare penances, Makarakannan, despite red blood flowing profusely from his mouth, jumped into the sky in a split second. From there, he created havoc, as devastating as that caused by thunder, wind and fire during pralaya. A wild, roaring wind blew in all the regions. Moist black clouds showered a rain of stones. Fire engulfed by smoke was seen in all the directions where the monkeys ran for shelter. Over one crore monkeys perished. On seeing this, Rāma asked Vibheeshana, "Is the havoc I see the result of this Rākshasa's sorcery or the boons he has secured?" Vibheeshana replied, "By doing severe penance, Makarakannan propitiated Vāyu and Varuna. Unable to resist, they have granted divine boons to him." The lotus-eyed Rāma said that in a trice he would put an end to all the destruction being caused by

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Makarakannan. The great Rāma then shot a fierce arrow, which carried with it invocations to Vāyu and Varuna, and made the wind and rain disappear into the big dark sea. *Makarakannan now replicated several of his own forms and created a series of tridents in the sky. The all-knowing Rāma exclaimed, "What tricks a single deceptive person can play!"* Makarakannan who had filled the sky with his illusory images, went into hiding making it impossible for anyone to find him. Rāma became concerned. He wondered, "In spite of blood gushing from the mouth of Makarakannan, he has hidden his body somewhere in the sky." *Then he noticed blood oozing from a spot. Into that spot, he shot a sharp thunderous arrow which severed the head of Makarakannan. His lifeless body crashed to the ground. The illusions created by him vanished like a dream that disappears when sleep comes to an end!*

Possessing a mighty chariot flying multicoloured flags, Raktakannan, a Rākshasa resembling the summer sun, came like the wind into the battlefield, showering fiery arrows. He was opposed by the furious Nalan. Striking panic in the enemy ranks, Raktakannan bent his stiff bow, displayed the might of his shoulders, and showered a number of arrows like the pralaya submarine fire. Nalan resisted these arrows with a big tree. The fearless Raktakannan cut the tree swung by Nalan. Watching this, Nalan who was unique in his valour, shrunk his chest and leapt on the head of the Rākshasa to the joyous uproar of the Devas. *Looking like a rain-bow on a burning mountain, the graceful Nalan stood on the head of the gigantic Rākshasa and kicked him on his head so fiercely, that his skull cracked and his brain came out. Blood flowed profusely through Raktakannan's eyes, nose and ears, and he fell dead.* Singan, a Rākshasa with fiery eyes, who held a bow and had fierce arrows, came there in a chariot decorated with garlands and accosted Nalan. A vānara known as Panasan who had the prowess of the Meru, suddenly jumped into the fray. Singan shot ten thunderous arrows at the shoulders and chest of Panasan who flared up like fire fed with ghee. He quickly lifted Singan's chariot up. But Singan, with his red eyes and gigantic physique, jumped onto the ground. *At once Panasan hurled the chariot at Singan, made him fall and trampled him to death. The virulent arrows of Rāma and Lakshmana and the rocks and trees hurled by the vānaras completely annihilated the Rākshasa army of ten vellams. Rāvana's messengers, who did not even touch a weapon, went to him!*

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21. BRAHMĀSTRAM

The messengers informed Rāvana of the death of Makarakannan, the trampling of Raktakannan by a vānara, the demise of Singan and the annihilation of the Rākshasa army. The wicked Rāvana ordered that his son Indrajit be brought to him immediately. The messengers went and told Indrajit that his father wanted to see him. Indrajit asked the messengers whether all the Rākshasās who had gone to the front had died. The messengers replied, "Among those who are sent to this war, who else except you can return safe?" and narrated all that had happened in the battlefield. Indrajit came to Rāvana, paid his respects to him and said, "O lord, please do not grieve that our warriors have died. Today, you are going to see countless heaps of monkey carcasses, while Seeta and the Devas will see the lifeless bodies of Rāma and Lakshmana." After circumambulating his father and paying his respects, Indrajit boarded a chariot drawn by a thousand lions capable of flying in the air. With the beating of war-drums, he proceeded towards the battlefield accompanied by sixty vellam sword-wielding Rākshasās, herds of elephants, horses and chariots. *Drums like udukkai, karadigai, urumai, cendai, timilai, takkai, pampai, berigai, and murasu, were beaten. Sounds were raised by large bells, conches, cymbals, flutes and other melodious instruments known as ambai, oomai, kanurai and kambali. Drums and bells hanging on the sides of elephants, sounded like the roaring sea.* Jingling bells made of gold adorned the horses. The heroes' anklets worn by warriors holding flags clanged so loudly that the noise was heard in the sky. *The blare of the conches, bugles, drums, trumpets, wind instruments and flutes, the laughter of the neighing horses, the clamour of chariots, the roar of lions and the trumpeting of elephants, was deafening.* The uproar caused by the twanging of bows, the clamour of warriors and the slapping of their own shoulders along with their harsh footfalls drowned the roar of the sea. The four divisions of armed forces, as large as the four seas, marched expeditiously over the wide land. The dust that arose covered the sky. *As a result, a sea of tears flowed from the celestial women's eyes which were like the ocean of milk!*

Like the sun surrounded by the planets, Indrajit, was surrounded by crores of warriors on chariots. They looked as if they had come down from the celestial capital. Reaching the wild front, Indrajit arranged his army in the shape of a bird with an open mouth. Hordes of Rākshasās formed the 'feathers', 'nose', 'eyes', 'neck', 'body' and 'legs' of the bird! Ready to fight, Indrajit blew his right-whorled conch which was left

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behind by the fleeing Devendra during an earlier encounter. *Hidden in the belly of this conch was the terrifying blare heard during the end of a yuga.* It forced the vast army of monkeys to run like elephants frightened by the roar of a lion. Besides this loud sound, Indrajit raised another deafening one by twanging his mighty bow. The ears of the vānaras were split. The rocks and trees slid from their hands. They trembled with fear. They commented, "We are losing our hair in plenty! We will certainly be losing our lives soon." Except the great heroes like Sugreeva, Hanuman, Angada, Rāma, Lakshmana and Vibheeshana the rest of the army lost their nerve and fled from the battlefield like a flood of water breaking out of its embankment. A clamour (raised by the Rākshasa army) resembling the loud noise of the pralaya sea, filled all the regions. Over the mighty shoulders of Hanuman and Angada, were seated Rāma and Lakshmana holding bows and wearing garlands of flowers. Resembling Lord Tirumāl seated on the celestial Garuda and Lord Siva riding the divine Bull, they were blessed by the Devas with a shower of flowers. Neelan and other commanders of the vānara army holding mighty trees and rocks in their hands, were ready for the battle. Rāma, the universal protector, thought of the impending war and told Neelan and the others, "The darts used earlier by cruel Indrajit, could not be withstood by you. Leave the front line, stand behind, and watch our masterly archery." The vānara warriors did accordingly. *Rāma and Lakshmana showered a rain of thunderous arrows on the enemy army consisting of chariots, horses, mountain-like elephants wearing decorated face-plates and the Rākshasa infantry looking like the pralaya darkness.* Indrajit, the renowned archer, stood on the sky-high pile of corpses and became dizzy. He asked, "Have all the elephants and proud horses (that came to the front) lost their lives? Have all the chariots been destroyed? Are there no sword-wielding Rākshasās even to clear the heaps of corpses from the battleground?" Indrajit wondered again, "Undoubtedly the number of Rākshasās destroyed by these heroes would be almost sixty vellams. Rāma appears to have annihilated the army neither by his arrows nor by his curses, but by inscrutable magic!"

A surprised Indrajit looked at the rain of arrows shot by Rāma and Lakshmana, at the overflowing river of blood, at the heaps of corpses touching the sky, at the heaps of pearls fallen from the broken tusks of elephants, at the slain elephants, and then at the graceful shoulders of Rāma and Lakshmana who had accomplished these feats. After seeing the huge pile of rocks thrown by the vānaras, the heaps of severed heads with wild eyes touching the sky, the arrows which severed these heads, the shining weapons scattered on the battleground, and Rāma and Lakshmana's bows, *a shocked*

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Indrajit heard the twanging of their bows, too! *A bewildered Indrajit* saw their speeding arrows which, after destroying one thousand chariots, slaying mighty elephants and prancing horses, and severing the heads of a thousand Rākshasās, proceeded further without any hindrance. A *dazed Indrajit* pondered upon the inadequacy of the Rākshasa weapons which never touched the enemies and were burnt to ashes like a forest scorched by fire. A *wonderstruck Indrajit* saw the heart-rending scenes of weeping Rākshasis falling over the dead bodies of their husbands and beating their bellies with their hands. Not aware of the speed of the leonine Angada and Hanuman, a *dazed Indrajit* would see crores of Angadas and feel that the whole world was not large enough for Hanuman to occupy. Indrajit also wondered whether only Rāma and Lakshmana were seen everywhere. *A surprised Indrajit* looked at the jubilation of the Devas and the flowers showered by them. He saw the twitching of his left shoulder as a bad omen. He looked at the vast battlefield filled with corpses and watched the dead elephants being carried away by the flood of blood. Even after seeing the destruction of crores of chariots and the annihilation of the army, the vānaras who had taken to their heels did not return to the front as they could not shake off the fear instilled by cruel Indrajit. A vast multitude of sixty vellams of Rākshasās now lay dead on the ground. The remaining were faced by the mighty and alert Rāma and Lakshmana. Watching their unique feat, Hanuman roared aloud slapping his immeasurable shoulders. Owing to his thunderous clamour, some of the Rākshasās fell down from their chariots, some rolled on the ground throwing their weapons away, and the citizens of Lanka (protected by golden walls) spat blood and lost their lives. Looking darker than a black cloud, Indrajit told his army, "You have lost your courage at the mere roar of Hanuman! Cowards as you are you cannot fight fiercely! You have become useless like the dead ones lying here." After glaring at them, Indrajit came alone to fight with Rāma and Lakshmana. Indrajit's fury frightened the Devas and made the heads of the eight regional elephants tremble.

Lakshmana bent his bow and strung it with his red hand. He paid obeisance to Rāma and said, "The world will blame me thinking that I was defeated through the Nāgapāsam shot by Indrajit. *I will be faulted for both my inability to protect and remove the agony of my dear friends, and my inability to inflict harm on Indrajit in a straight combat.* Having failed in these, I did not even give up my life in the battlefield. All these blemishes will be associated with me forever. O eternal Lord, if my arrows cannot sever and dispatch Indrajit's head to the sky, I will be cursed by all who lost their lives as food for Yama in the battlefield. Let me sunder the head of that

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wretched Indrajit in front of your eyes. I take a vow that if I fail in my attempt, the reward for my humble service to you shall be denied to me." Listening to Lakshmana, the Devas were jubilant. Countless worlds as also dharma, raised a clamour. Yama, too, roared with joy! *With a smile, Rāma told Lakshmana, "Once you decide to slay someone, even the Supreme Lords, Siva and Tirumāl cannot stop you. Dear Lakshmana, can anything happen in this world except what you decide?"* Lakshmana happily prostrated himself at Rāma's feet and said, "This very day you will see me killing hordes of Rākshasās surrounded by innumerable chariots." As Lakshmana sped towards the front, Angada raised a thunderous clamour making the lions drawing the valiant Indrajit's chariot, tremble. Lakshmana's conch blared out louder than the roaring sea. *The Rākshasās reacted by hurling curved clubs, tridents, discs, spears, mighty maces, sharp caltrops, sling stones and the house-breaking instruments known as kannagams. Attacked by the handsome Lakshmana, all these weapons fell from above, as though a number of stars had dropped down simultaneously.* Many pieces of these weapons fell scattered in the nearby forests, and gleamed.

The four divisions of the army were destroyed beyond recognition by Lakshmana's arrows. It was impossible to identify clearly the limbs of a horse or the horse which belonged to a particular chariot or the warrior to whom a body belonged. *The severed heads of sons along with the arrows, fell on the chariots of their fathers. The sturdy big heads of fathers were severed and fell on the chariots of the sons. The big hands of warriors holding arrows were also severed. They floated on the red flood of blood, like red-eyed swordfish swimming in the sea.* Cut by Lakshmana's fierce arrows, the flags, umbrellas and other parts of the chariots, fell on the ground and resembled birds perched on a sea of blood. The seats on elephants, arrows, chariots, mighty long bows and various other weapons and flags, acted as fuel for the sparks of fire coming from the eyes of the dead. The corpses baked in that fire, provided welcome food for the demons. *Some chariots were stranded with their wheels broken, some were bent because the reins holding them had been cut, while some other chariots rolled about aimlessly because the charioteers, the warriors riding in them, and the horses drawing them were slain.* At this stage, Rāma goaded Hanuman to proceed towards Indrajit, and shot sharp arrows continuously like the torrential rain. As a result, all the chariots were completely demolished as though the celestial chariots flying in the sky had crashed down. Indrajit was left with his chariot as his lone companion. Looking at Rāma and Lakshmana, he asked in great fury, "Are you both going to fight with me together? Or will one of you who is fit, come forward and

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forfeit your life? Both of you may fight with me along with your army and face destruction. Let me know your wish. I will fight accordingly." Lakshmana replied, "I have taken a vow to confront you with swords, arrows, fists, or any other weapon and squeeze the life out of you."

Indrajit said, "There is no purpose in my being born as the son of Rāvana, if I do not kill your brother born before you, only after killing you, the brother born after him! Your name Elakkuvan (Lakshmana), is quite appropriate, because you will be the elakku (target) for my arrow. Even if Lord Siva were to intervene and try to stop me, I would shatter His prowess and win. Your elder brother, Rāma, will see this with his own eyes. I concede that you and Rāma are the two archers who slew sixty vellam Rākshasās with your arrows. For bringing discredit to the Rākshasa race, you will now, in dismay, watch me kill the seventy vellam vānaras with my bow. I will make this world desolate in a moment with a single bow! I am not Rāvana's brother, Kumbhakarna. I cannot be killed like him. *I am the son of Rāvana.* Unlike Akshakumāran and Atikāyan, I stand out distinctly in my heroism. Only with the blood flowing from you and your brother will I perform the last rites of my uncle, Kumbhakarna, and my two brothers." Lakshmana retorted, "Vibheeshana has joined us to perform the last rites of all the Rākshasās who will soon be dead. As for the last rites of your father Rāvana, you had better do it now in your mind, because it is he who will be performing those rites for you in great agony."

Indrajit flew into a rage. He shot numerous sharp and lustrous arrows which could squeeze the lives out of the army of vānaras who had spread themselves out like the ocean of milk. Filling the entire battlefield with his arrows, he shot a thousand at Angada, two thousand at Hanuman and a countless number at the leonine vānara warriors. *The tormenting arrows were shot so inncessantly that his sturdy bow stood bent for a nāzhigai like the crescent moon appearing in the sky!* Resembling the scorching rays of the midday sun, his arrows attacked the back, front and sides of the army of vānaras. Looking at the fury of Indrajit's hands, the Devas were frightened and closed their eyes with their hands and remained breathless. Lakshmana, the lion, removed the arrows that had pierced him and those that were yet to pierce him! *Like exposing the lies uttered by unrighteous persons, Indrajit's arrows were proved ineffective by Lakshmana's divine darts!* The magnanimous Rāma felt it was unfair to shoot his arrows at Indrajit when he was engaged in combat with Lakshmana, and stood back without participating in the fight.

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Indrajit and Lakshmana, were so well matched that one could not vanquish the other. Their arrows burned like firewood and filled the sky. Like the pralaya fire, the sparks coming out of their arrows, burnt forests, big rocks, golden horses, inner parts of clouds and all parts of the world. Lakshmana's arrows offered 'food' to Yama by killing the thousand mighty lions which drew Indrajit's chariot. Without a good chariot, Indrajit appeared like the sun without its halo. He drove the damaged chariot, showering scorching arrows as if he was out to annihilate the vānara race. Standing on a broken chariot, Indrajit covered the shoulders of Angada and Lakshmana with white crescent-moon-like arrows and blew his conch and frightened the whole world.

Leonine Lakshmana shot ten swift, scorching, thunderous arrows at Indrajit's golden armour trying to free it from his body, and raised a loud sound by twanging the string of his bow. Watching Lakshmana, Rāma shed tears of joy from his lotus eyes. With a smile resembling the brightness of the crescent moon, he called upon his army to give a victorious ovation to Lakshmana. The vānara warriors immediately raised a great clamour, loud enough to break the universe and cause agony to others. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, Indrajit disappeared into the sky. *On seeing this, the great Lakshmana told Rāma, "If Indrajit survives, he is certain to destroy our armies. I have no option but to use the divine Brahmāstram on him." Rāma replied, "O one who never deviates from dharma! If you use the all-pervading Brahmāstram, it will annihilate the three worlds. No one can stop it. Therefore, you had better avoid it." The good brother accepted Rāma's advice.* The deceitful Indrajit who was hiding in the sky, understood the minds of the brothers. Wanting to deploy the divine Brahmāstram, Indrajit left the battlefield. On seeing this, the Devas in the sky were deceived. They laughed happily and clapped their hands.

Into the far-off sky, Indrajit moved like a big dark cloud. Happy that Indrajit had fled in fear, the vānara heroes raised a loud clamour showing a mixture of fury and pleasure, and returned like a surging flood. Indrajit, who was defeated that day by Lakshmana, became disturbed like the churned ocean of milk and disappeared into the city of Lanka. The mighty-shouldered Rāma and Lakshmana were still unable to grasp Indrajit's prowess or strategy. Trying to achieve his objective, Indrajit proceeded to perform a yāga with the chanting of the Védas. Getting down from the respective shoulders of Hanuman and Angada, Rāma and Lakshmana removed their bows, quivers containing fierce arrows, armour and gloves. The Devas blessed them

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jubilantly, showering cool flowers on them. The loud clamour raised by the vānara army, reached the sky. The sun left hurriedly and set in the west, as if he wanted to avoid watching Indrajit deploy the Brahmāstram on the noble Lakshmana! Rāma told Vibheeshana, "Our army is very tired, having fought day and night. There is delay in providing food for them. I want you to bring them food." Complying with Rāma's request, Vibheeshana left with his associates and crossed the sea of darkness in a flash. Meanwhile, Rāma told Lakshmana, "Let us use the divine weapons only after worshipping the concerned deities. Till my return, I entrust the army to your care." Then Rāma left the battlefield.

Indrajit, after leaving the battlefield, met Rāvana and explained all that had happened, including Lakshmana's wanting to use the Brahmāstram on him. Rāvana was perplexed. He asked his son, "What shall we do now?" *Indrajit replied, "If a person dares to kill me, it is better that I kill him first, if I can. This is what the wise have said. It is therefore better to use the Brahmāstram on Rāma and Lakshmana without being seen by them. If they know I am going to deploy the Brahmāstram on them, they will use the same dart on me and prevent me from using it. Those ascetics are capable of killing me if they see me today. Nothing is going to happen between now and tomorrow. I will perform a good yāga and end their lives in a moment. To enable me to execute my plan without the knowledge of Rāma and Lakshmana, please send an endless stream of capable armies to fight them."* After listening to Indrajit, Rāvana told Mahōdharan, "You brave one! Take Akamban and innumerable Rākshasās to the front and kill those two men by using sorcery." Mahōdaran, who was waiting for an opportunity to lead, proudly raised his head. He left the place and boarded a chariot. Hordes of Rākshasās (like a herd of rutting elephants surrounding a mountain) accompanied him. Countless swift chariots and innumerable galloping horses joined them. The weapons held by the Rākshasās, the jewels worn by them and the crescent-moon-like teeth in their wide open mouths, were as bright as the light of the sun and moon simultaneously flashing side by side. The ends of their sturdy flags flapping in the wind, rose up into the sky, and destabilised the thunderous clouds!

The furious Rākshasās, with drawn-in lips and sword-like teeth, constantly waved the powerful weapons held in their hands, which like streaks of lightning shedding bright light from the sky, caused sparks of fire (emitting smoke). *The hundred vellam troops sent by Rāvana, poured out of Lanka's gateway as if it had consumed the sea*

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(like the Tamil sage, Agastya, had once done) and was now spewing it. The army with its blaring conches, drums, trumpets and cymbals, uproarious commanders, twanging bows, trumpeting elephants, neighing horses and rumbling chariots contained everything, as if it was Tirumāl (who contains the whole world). The vast army of Rākshasās entered the battlefield. The vānara army, too, arrived there. After protecting themselves from the torrents of arrows shot by the Rākshasās, all the vānaras together raised a thunderous clamour, threatening everyone in the enemy camp and hurled crores of rocks. Each one of them killed four to five Rākshasās, injured elephants and galloping horses, and destroyed the chariots. Attacked by the Rākshasās with tridents, ploughs, swords, curved clubs, spears, hooks, spiked maces and arrows, hordes of vānaras rolled dead on the ground. Other weapons like pestles, discs, caltrops, hoops and sling stones, demolished not only the vānaras, but also the rocks thrown by them. When the vānaras who were only Devas, lost their lives in the battle, they got back their original forms, and moved about in the celestial region, along with the other Devas. The celestial dancers embraced these Devas who had returned from the battlefield, and found relief from the sickness of love! *Even the deceitful, heartless and sinful Rākshasās who were killed by Lakshmana's arrows, became immortal Devas, proving that there was nothing more sacred than his arrows.*

A mace emitting heat and light like a diamond rock set with precious gems, had been left behind in the battlefield by Kumbhakarna. Hanuman picked it up and indulged in large-scale slaying which made the Devas wonder whether he was wind or fire. Looking like another form of Yama's fury, Hanuman killed several Rākshasās using Kumbhakarna's mace and attacked the wild-eyed, mountainous rogue elephants and the galloping horses without sparing their heads or bodies or other limbs. Like the omnipresent lotus-eyed Tirumāl, he was everywhere. With great excitement, he caught and tore those who opposed him. Emitting sparks of fire from his eyes, he slapped the Rākshasās, and agitated the whole battlefield. *Looking at the lofty figure of Hanuman, the Devas wondered if he was the great Lord who had measured the three worlds in days of yore.* Adorned with pearls and diamonds, Hanuman who stood on the ground with his tall figure touching the clouds, broke the huge foreheads of rogue elephants. Taking the mace in his right hand, he pounded the earth. Pushing and kicking a thousand leonine Rākshasās who had pounced on him, he moved like the rutting regional elephants and sent those belligerent Rākshasa heroes, who rode into the battlefield, to heaven!

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Furious vānara leaders like Sugreeva, Neelan, Angada, Kumudan, and the mighty Panasan, entered the battlefield hoping to achieve victory, but found themselves in the midst of a sea of Rākshasās and could not even see one another. Hanuman, however, threw crores of Rākshasa warriors all over the battlefield and walked through the vast army like the ferocious Lord Narasimhamurti whose nails were His weapons! He suddenly saw Akamban. Equipped with a bow, Akamban possessed a mountainous chariot drawn by a thousand mules which moved as fast as the mind. In his previous birth, he was Tārukan whose sole occupation was killing and who was slain by Lord Muruga. Extolling the prowess of Hanuman, Akamban said, "Let Devendra, Lord Tirumāl and Lord Siva, or anyone else fight with this monkey. All of them will be victims of Yama. If I do not stop this Hanuman, he will destroy the Rākshasās and wipe out their very name." Showering a rain of deadly arrows with great fury, Akamban proceeded towards Hanuman. Seeing this, Hanuman advanced quickly and faced him. Swinging his mace and wielding it with the enthusiasm of a new student, Hanuman fought him.

Akamban advanced, vowing that he would dispatch Hanuman to the heavens, make Rāvana victorious, defeat Rāma and Lakshmana and cause everlasting agony to the Devas. Hanuman 'invited' him to do so. Akamban driving a chariot which sported a flag, showered a series of fiery arrows. Raising a clamour, he moved fast towards Hanuman. Akamban's gold-tipped arrows which had once pierced the chests of the Devas, now attacked the chest of Hanuman, inflicting severe wounds from which blood flowed profusely. Though Hanuman was tired, he smashed the mules drawing Akamban's chariot with his victorious mace. The charioteer rolled to the ground and the chariot was destroyed. Resembling the darkness of night, Akamban decided that he could not defeat Hanuman by using the bow. Taking a mace with sharp spikes, he approached Hanuman with a clamour. The two advanced, moving left and right, slapping their respective shoulders loudly. They lifted and tried to crush one another. They leapt over and dashed each other against the ground. They paused for a while only to start a fresh bout. Each prevented the other from using his hands by holding them firmly. Not knowing who was stronger, each swore at and gripped the other, and ran left and right instead of running around. The truthful Hanuman, finally jumped onto the chest of Akamban and smashed him with his mace. When Akamban tried to attack with a club, Hanuman broke the club and his hand. Akamban now stood like the vast sea. With his mighty left hand, he hit Hanuman on his chest like thunder

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hitting a sturdy mountain. Hanuman thought that it would be unethical to use his mace on Akamban who was weaponless. Drawing in his lips and discarding his mace, Hanuman hit Akamban's chest with his left hand, forcing him to vomit blood. *Receiving another blow on the temple, Akamban fell dead and joined the celestials. Like wild animals when they see a lion, the frightened Rākshasa army accompanying him, ran in all directions.*

In another part of the battlefield, Rākshasās and furious elephants were slain by Lakshmana's arrows. Chariots with their flags were destroyed and their horses were let loose. But the mountain-shouldered Hanuman, heard neither the clamour of a flight, nor the thunderous twang of Lakshmana's bow and became concerned. In the mean time, in the south-western direction, Angada had penetrated seven yōjanas deep into the enemy ranks while Sugreeva had gone past him by fourteen yōjanas. Lakshmana had overtaken Sugreeva by fifty-six yōjanas. The rest of the vānara army, after moving nine yōjanas, clustered around the Rākshasa army, like moss spread over a sheet of water. *Hanuman, the victorious hero, reached a place which was two yōjanas from where Lakshmana was fighting. Even then Hanuman could not see Lakshmana. Moving with the speed of a whirlwind, Hanuman only saw certain signs which made him hopeful of sighting Lakshmana.* Hanuman saw a big river of blood full of foam in the shape of a regal white umbrella. In its flow, the river carried the tusks of elephants, umbrellas made of peacock feathers, golden chains set with precious gems, pearls and lustrous weapons resembling fish. The heads severed by Lakshmana's arrows went up, hit the celestial region and fell down along with the arrows like a rain of stones showered during the great deluge. Lakshmana's arrows flew all over the sky and were seen by everyone. These arrows were as lustrous as Siva's curly locks. The mountainous heaps of flaming headless trunks from which torrents of blood gushed, reached the sky. Countless chariots, elephants and prancing horses, lost all the warriors they were carrying and wandered aimlessly. *They moved like the destabilised subjects of a kingdom whose king never cared to protect them.* Lakshmana, with a garland of flowers on his chest, showered a rain of arrows creating a mountain of Rākshasa corpses with pools of blood and heaps of lustrous weapons. Hanuman saw all this. When he heard the loud twang of Lakshmana's bow, he shouted (twice as loudly as the roar of the pralaya sea) for joy, followed the sound, and reached Lakshmana.

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Even before Lakshmana could see Hanuman properly, the latter paid homage to him. Lakshmana was happy he could learn all the details of the battle from Hanuman. Embracing him, he asked, "O hero, where are our vānaras? How was Sugreeva separated from you? Where has Angada gone? I am not aware of what happened to our huge army which was submerged in the wide sea of darkness." Hanuman, with his hands folded over his head, said, "Lord, I do not know who ran away from the battlefield, nor do I know how they ran away or what happened to those who were engaged in war. We will know all this only after their return. Lord! I will tell you a mantra which will remove all illusions. As one who is well versed in the scriptures, you may chant it, if you think fit. The sorcery resorted to by the enemies will have to be removed by divine darts. Our warriors will not be able to reach you otherwise." *Thus spoke Hanuman who had crossed the natural sea, as well as the sea of grammar known as 'Aindiram'! Lakshmana whose only wealth was his archery, acted on Hanuman's suggestion. Paying obeisance to the thousand-named Rāma and selecting the choicest divine darts, he dedicated them to Lord Siva, and shot them with lightning speed at Rākshasās possessing shining teeth.* Instantly, like the pralaya fire entering a bamboo grove, the entire army of Rākshasās was totally burnt and annihilated. Darkness was removed from all regions. Realising the divine nature of Lakshmana's arrows, Mahōdaran disappeared. The vānara warriors who had fled earlier in discomfiture, roared like thunder-clouds. Dancing ecstatically, they reached Lakshmana. He was relieved to hear that no harm had befallen anyone in his army. *Showered with different types of flowers by the Devas and surrounded by the excited vānaras, Lakshmana looked graceful.*

Rāvana's messengers told him all that had happened. Rāvana thought that these messengers had fled out of fear. He asked them how a solitary bow could destroy and kill crores of Rākshasās along with countless elephants. The messengers replied that it was done with the help of Siva's dart! Ordered by Rāvana, they went to Indrajit and told him everything. Annoyed with what he heard, Indrajit urged the messengers to tell him at once where, in the front, Rāma, Hanuman, Vibheeshana and the monkeys, were. They replied, "Rāma is on another mountain. Vibhishana who is aware of all the tricks of the Rākshasās, has gone to fetch food for the vānara army, the supply of which has already been delayed." Indrajit thought that the time to use the Brahmāstram had come. He went up to a big banyan tree. The Rākshasa brahmins brought the requisite materials to perform the yāga that Indrajit had planned. Using

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his arrows, Indrajit provided materials for the yāga fire. Into that sacrificial fire, he showered tumbai flowers and black gingili seeds, and poured goat's blood and ghee. The fragrant fire went upwards curling on the right side. Considering this a good omen and convinced of his victory, the treacherous Indrajit rose up into the sky to shoot the Brahmāstram. Indrajit, who was well known for his sorcery, noted that the planetary positions were also favourable to him. *He hid himself in the moist, cloudy sky, unseen by the Devas. Even the sages did not know what was happening.*

Meanwhile, Mahōdaran thought of deceiving everyone and appeared in the guise of Devendra riding Irāvatam. He played several tricks, which prompted the frightened vānaras to retreat in despair and shout, "Devendra seated on Irāvatam is accompanied by the Devas and sages who worship God. Why have all of them joined the war to fight against us?" Looking at the lustrous face of Hanuman, Lakshmana asked him, "Why have the sages and the Devas come to fight with us? What harm have we done them? Please tell me." *Even as Lakshmana was talking, Indrajit shot the Brahmāstram at him. Crores of lustrous arrows pierced Lakshmana's body like a large flock of birds converging on a big mountain. Lakshmana did not know what to do. He lost his senses. He was like a huge exhausted elephant fallen on its bed.* Hanuman thought that the attack came from Devendra, and wondered why he should have done this. Suddenly crores of arrows attacked Hanuman and he, too, fell unconscious. Even Sugreeva, the great son of Soorya, was attacked all over his body by fierce arrows. He bled profusely and resembled a golden hill with a forest full of blood-red flowers. He fell on the ground with his eyes looking like molten copper. Angada in the mean time was pierced by ten thousand arrows and fell like a lion struck by thunder. Sharp arrows also pierced the shoulders and chest of Jāmbavan, the renowned vānara hero, and he, too, fell on the ground. Neelan, pierced by a thousand sharp arrows, died looking at the face of Yama. Edaban reached the heavens. Attacked by a poisonous arrow, Panasan became inactive. Kumudan was killed by a fatal arrow. Nalan, who had built the Sétu, was also killed by a thousand arrows. Mayindan, his brother Tumindan, and Yama-like Gavayan were all slain. Kesari, attacked by a series of arrows, fell dead on the ground. A volley of arrows caused the death of Kanakan, impeccable Sangan, Satavali, Tamban, Sarabhan, Susedanan, Vinatan, Gandhamadanan, Idumban and Dadimukhan. A sea of blood flowing with a roar reached the tidal sea. All the vānaras were killed by a shower of sharp arrows. *The vānaras who died were only Devas who had come to assist Rāma. The celestial women who saw them, felt agitated.* Their lotus eyes drooped sadly. The blood gushing from the bodies of the vānaras spurted out like

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a forest of corals inside the ocean of milk! When the vānaras died and reached heaven, they were happily received by the celestials as their guests. Urging the 'vānara' warriors to go back to the earth and help Rāma and Lakshmana, the celestials told them, "You have worshipped the Brahmāstram of Lord Brahma, the creator of the world. You will not therefore die. You are the servants of the devotees of Rāma (Lord Tirumāl)! Not bound by the cycle of birth and death, you will attain heavenly bliss. All of you have gone to the earth only to fulfil our tasks. You have 'lost' your lives for Rāma's sake. Therefore you are our leaders."

Indrajit blew his victorious conch. He remarked scornfully that even though Lakshmana was dead along with the wild-eyed horde of monkeys, Rāma had not come to the battlefield. Indrajit sped to his father and narrated all that happened. Rāvana asked, "Did Rāma not die?" Indrajit replied, "Rāma deserted everyone and fled. Otherwise, when I killed his brother and destroyed his army, would he have stood quietly forgetting to fight with me.?" Agreeing with Indrajit, Rāvana said, "What you say must have happened." Indrajit then left for his palace. Mahōdaran, too, left. *When these events were taking place, Rāma, my Lord — whose slave I am (Kamban refers to himself) — was not in the battlefield.* In another place, he was offering worship with his lotus hands to the divine weapons! After completing his worship, he decided to return to the front. He took in his hand, the dart known as Agni-astram with which he removed the great omnipresent darkness. Walking slowly with his lotus feet, Rāma surveyed the battlefield which contained the bodies of crores of vānara warriors. Rāma looked in every direction again and again, and shed tears of blood. He penetrated deep into the corpse-ridden battlefield and saw each one of his vānara friends, who had earlier vanquished the foes, lying prostrate. Looking at Sugreeva's condition, Rāma wept and heaved a deep sigh. He asked with great anguish whether Sugreeva deserved such treatment. Rāma saw the state of Hanuman, too. Lamenting aloud, Rāma said, "O Hanuman, you had crossed the sea, entered Lanka and harassed the Rākshasās including those in their mothers' wombs. You had done everything to relieve me of my agony. Were your unique achievements meant only for me to see you in this pitiable state? Did the fierce Rākshasa arrows really pass through your body? My sinful acts seem to have negated the several boons granted to you by the Devas, the blessings of the sages and the good wishes of Seeta. Can there be anyone more harmful to you than I? By agreeing to rule the kingdom (which involved killing and doing other despicable acts), I killed my father and caused the premature death of Jatāyu who was like a father to me. I have also caused the destruction of the warriors here. And I am still alive. Is there no limit to my cruel deeds? Killing Vāli, I offered the vānara leadership

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to Sugreeva. I have now become the prime cause of the destruction of Sugreeva and his army. Have I taken birth only to be a dead weight to this earth?" *With sparks of fire flashing from the corners of his eyes, Rāma saw elephant-like Angada lying on the ground like a dead bull amidst a herd of bulls. Rāma wept and said, "Carrying arms, and wandering aimlessly, how blameworthy I have become for the 'fine protection' I gave to those who took refuge in me?"*

In the midst of a pool of bright blood, Lakshmana was lying in the battlefield struck by a series of lustrous arrows and covered by a great number of mighty corpses. *Rāma saw his brother lying in a state of deep sleep, similar to his own divine 'sleep', on the ocean of milk!* On seeing Lakshmana's condition, Rāma was full of grief and despair. He felt as if his body was on fire. His complexion became dull. Like a tree struck by lightning, he fell on the ground, making the goddess of dharma beat her eyes in grief. Rāma, who had taken birth because of his compassion for living beings, did not even breathe for a nāzhigai. He became unconscious. His eyes stopped blinking. His handsome limbs did not move. He did not, however, lose his life. With all his companions dead, there was no one to comfort Rāma, nor was there anyone to separate the arms that embraced Lakshmana. Except for headless trunks, women shedding bitter tears (because they could not trace their husbands), demons drooling over the heaps of corpses and innumerable jackals, no one was alive! Unable to bear Rāma's agony, celestial women shedding torrential tears, beat their bellies. *All animate and inanimate objects in the world shivered as they were only manifestations of Rāma himself! Brahma and Siva ceased to smile.* Heaving a sigh, Rāma opened his eyes and saw his brother clearly. Steeped in agony, he thought that Lakshmana had gone to heaven and would not come back. Suffering acutely as if fire had entered a wound in him, he lamented aloud, "Even after learning that my father was dead, I was alive. *When I gave away the whole world, I had not given away everything, because you were still with me. As long as you were alive, I was never lonely. I do not hear your words now. I do not want to live any longer. I am coming to you, dear brother! You are my mother, father, son and brother. You are my great penance and my wealth. Yet you deserted me unmindful of the great name and fame that awaited you.* As I am still alive, my heart is harder than yours. I do not see any life in your punctured body full of wounds. Yet I am alive with a healthy mind, lamenting bitterly. I am bound to be destroyed because my heart has not broken in two on seeing you. In the wild forest, when we were moving together during these fourteen years, you used to feed me with fruits and vegetables without eating any

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yourself. Have you fallen asleep out of exhaustion? Will you not put an end to your sleep? When the pronouncement of the world, that we were both fearless and alike (in our minds and hearts), has been falsified, how can you have any compassion for a sinner like me? Even after losing you an impeccable brother, I wander alive. From now on who will be your kith? Me or my life?

"I participated in Janaka's yāga, broke Siva's bow, welcomed Seeta (a poison for Rāvana), thinking she would sustain me. As a result, I have betrayed and destroyed all my close friends. Did I stop with that? No. I have brought all this havoc, too! My love for land has made my mothers and others suffer from severe pain similar to fire piercing a wound. All these 'achievements' are the outcome of my love for a woman! Great indeed is my fame! Do I deserve any pity? Now that you are dead, I do not wish to live any longer. If Bharata learns of this, he will die without ruling the kingdom. All my kith and kin will also die in agony, unable to breathe. *Afraid of giving up dharma, I prevented you from using the Brahmāstram. As a result, should all this happen?* Except me, you had given up everything! Except me, you relinquished everything including dharma, your mother, father and relatives! You never forgot me. Born as my companion, you followed me to the forest. I am alive even after seeing you dead. Am I an ordinary person? When the daughter of a noble person was imprisoned by a Rākshasa, dharma should have destroyed him. If that great dharma (extolled by eminent ones) had favoured a sinner, all the three worlds together should have perished. Such a thing has not happened. The prowess of my mighty bow should have destroyed the three worlds, instead of merely vanquishing the deep sea around Lanka, or destroying Virādha, Kavandha, and Vāli, or penetrating the seven big trees. I left the task of defeating Indrajit to you without taking part in the battle, despite my might. After your death, I do not want to lead a false life and be a burden to this earth! However, I am sorry I will continue to live till I kill Indrajit and other Rākshasās. *Our mothers, relatives, countrymen and sages, will be worried about our plight in the forest. I long very much to see them. Dear brother! When I return to my kingdom and meet them, you must rise and come forward to adorn me with the golden crown.*

"I was away from you when your body was completely bound by the serpent noose and even now when you are killed by our enemies, I appear to be doing what is done only by one who has no compassion. Will not people laugh at my 'laudable' victories? I had promised Vibheeshana the unique kingdom of Lanka. I am going to die now without fulfilling that promise. By uttering a lie, I have tarnished the name of my

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renowned race, and spoiled my fame in a reckless manner." Agitated Rāma sobbed and heaved a sigh. Embracing the chest of Lakshmana who appeared dead (with all his senses defunct), Rāma became speechless, forgot himself, and slept. Seeing Rāma in such a state, the Devas wept. Shuddering to think of the final outcome, they suffered great anguish and said, "O God, you suffer on account of us. As God incarnate, your agony is only a feigned one. Can there be any real suffering for you who are beyond the realm of joy and sorrow? Except following the path shown by you, what else can we do as your loyal devotees? We had prayed to you to wipe out the Rākshasa race and remove our agony. Out of compassion for us, you took incarnations which had no bearing to your greatness. You are now born as a king to protect the people. Will you not remove all the illusions you have created for the sake of destroying the Rākshasās? We fondly hope that you will soon allay the sufferings of the three worlds. In recognising your present predicament, we seem to be losing sight of the fact that you are the foremost Supreme God, Lord Mahāvishnu. There cannot be a greater act of illusion than this one. You are the ruler of slaves like us. Have you started posing as a man in despair just to perpetuate your deception?

"O Lord Vishnu, you had swallowed all the worlds and all beings and brought them out later. You had kept them within and without, measured them, dug them out and remained in and out of them. You emulate the spider which spins its web with a thin thread produced from its mouth. You keep on indulging in these acts perennially. *O Lord, sorrow really never overtakes you. Your 'sufferings' are only your pleasant pranks! To those who do not understand all this, your 'sufferings' will cause agony which can be relieved only at your will.* You have no beginning, middle or end. You appear as if you can be discerned by one's senses, but in reality it is not so. We were free from fear after your incarnation. But when we see you suffering even before the completion of your task, we become miserable and weak. O great Lord born from a womb for protecting us! Unless you decide to guard yourself from these feigned sufferings, we will not be able to cast off the illusions which are your creations. You showed your grace to King Ambarisha and to Lord Siva*. O Lord, we now seek your protection and succour. O able associate of your brother! Will you not relieve us from this agony and restore our senses to us." The Devas said all these things and became intensely sorrowful. Rāma, who had decided to suffer for a while at the time

** Lord Tirumāl saved Ambarisha from the clutches of a demon sent by sage Doorvāsa, and saved Lord Siva from Bhasmāsura.*

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of his incarnation as a man, appeared to be unconscious due to his boundless love for his younger brother, Lakshmana. The Rākshasa emissaries went to Rāvana and said, "The mighty arrows shot by your son, Indrajit, in that fierce battle with killings galore, caused the death of all the associates of Rāma. They are lying dead on the ground. Lakshmana, born after Rāma, is dead before him. Looking at this, Rāma was in such great grief, that he, too, is dead. All your enemies have been annihilated."

22. SEETA SEES THE BATTLEFIELD

The wicked Rāvana was ebullient. He was certain that the emissaries would not utter a lie and gave them all the ornaments he wore. He was so liberal with the emissaries that they became over-satiated. He called his drummers and said, "Let the drums tied on the backs of mighty elephants be beaten aloud to ask the citizens of Lanka to be happy. Let them all be told to enjoy themselves and bathe after applying ghee." Then, he called Maruttan and said, "Let all the Rākshasa corpses lying on the battlefield be secretly thrown into the sea. Except you, if anyone else comes to know of my orders, your head as well as the greatness which I had conferred on you will be taken away." Accordingly, Maruttan threw all the Rākshasa corpses into the sea. Commanding the Rākshasis guarding Seeta to place her in a celestial chariot, Rāvana said, "Show her what happened to Rāma and Lakshmana. Unless she herself sees their state, she will not believe it." The Rākshasis roared and took Seeta (who had lost all hopes of survival) to the vast battleground. There, she saw the body of Rāma with her own eyes. She suffered as if she had consumed poison. Her body withered. Her senses and life began to ebb. She was like a cool lotus-flower scorched by fire. None in the world had experienced the agony suffered by Seeta on that day.

Looking at Seeta weeping, the celestial women, the wives of the Trinity of Gods (Uma Devi, Saraswati and Lakshmi) and Ganga Devi wept. Even the merciless Rākshasis wept. Mother Earth (who had brought forth Seeta), the Védas, the god of virtue, and even the ruthless vices, shed tears. Seeta became breathless and unconscious. The Rākshasis sprinkled water on her face and raised her with their hands. After a long time, Seeta regained consciousness and wept again. Looking at the state of her cloud-complexioned husband, Seeta became livid. She beat her fish-like eyes with her lotus hands. Weeping bitterly, she beat her breasts and belly and prostrated herself in the direction of Rāma, rolled like a creeper falling into fire, disfigured herself in great despair, quivered like lightning, became agitated and sprang up. Sweating profusely, Seeta withered, sobbed, rose, sat, wrung her slender

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hands and laughed. She called aloud, "O my dear husband! O king of the people of Ayōdhya! O Lord with divine feet at which people of all the worlds prostrate themselves!" She became weary in body and mind. She wailed aloud and said, "O god of dharma, without befriending my husband who had shunned your enemies and loved you intensely, you have fallen into the hands of sinful Rākshasās and become treacherous. You can no longer be known as compassionate. O fate bereft of truth! Can you tolerate the agony of persons like me who never transgressed the path of the Védas? I will no longer respect you. O cruel one, are you playing with me? I cannot tolerate the sight of what has happened to my dear husband. O Yama! Is it proper for you to spare me and take away the life of my husband?

"O my dear husband, the very life and grace of this humble woman is you. Have you flung me into an endless abyss of darkness? O Rāma, all lives are in you! You are the strength of the Devas. You are like my eyes. Have I been suffering patiently all these days only to be reunited with your wounded body? You are nectar to Goddess Lakshmi. You are properly understood only through sacred books. O my God, was it to endanger your life that you reached the city of Mithila and took the hands of this sinner in the presence of fire? If your virtuous mother, Kausalya, comes to know of your pitiable condition, will she survive? All your younger brothers, too, will end their lives. O embodiment of truth, did Kaikeyi send us to the forest thinking of our impending ruin? You asked me to stay back in the great lustrous city of Ayōdhya. Not agreeing, I followed you to the smoke-ridden forest and made you kill the enemies. I failed to show any love for you. Insisting that you bring me the deer at once, and threatening to take my life if you did not go, I sent you away and Lakshmana, too, and I stood alone. Was it with the object of causing your death in a long war, that I did so? Pouring ghee profusely, you would have performed several great yāgas, and reigned over the kingdom of Kōsala full of expansive fertile lands. Because you married me and touched my body, your truthful words and good fortune have all vanished.

" *O great Lakshmana, destiny brought you along with me and my husband into the forest. Your mother, Sumitra, told you then, 'If due to fate, your elder brother Rāma were to die, you must end your life before him!' Have you now obeyed her words and ended your life? When Rāma was sleeping on a bed of flowers and creepers, you stood guard without even blinking your eyes. Have you now preferred the cool and 'soft' bed of arrows shot by the cruel Rākshasās?* Let me die and get rid of my sufferings by falling on the divine face of Rāma." When Seeta tried to jump from the celestial chariot, she was stopped by Tirisadai. Like the deity sought after, she consoled Seeta, urging

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her to shake off her distress. Embracing her, and asking the Rākshasis to move away from them, Tirisadai told Seeta, "O swan-like mother, you have not thought of the dubious methods adopted by the Rākshasās in the past. Sending Mārica in the guise of a golden deer to entice you, presenting a false Janaka before your eyes, binding Lakshmana and the others with the serpent noose and releasing them thereafter, are all the illusions resorted to by the Rākshasās. What you see now is only another such illusion. Do not be frightened. Perhaps, you have forgotten about the earlier dreams and good omens, your impeccable chastity, the sinful acts of the Rākshasās and the virtues of the heroic Rāma who is the Lord of the Devas and the protector of dharma. Will the lotus-eyed Rāma ever die at the hands of these despicable Rākshasās? Do you not see that his divine body is not attacked by any arrow? Does not the face of Lakshmana, despite having been attacked by arrows, shine as bright as the pralaya sun? There is no danger to their lives. *If Rāma were dead, the fourteen worlds, by now, would have been burnt and destroyed, and the sun would have failed to move in its celestial orbit*. The fact that the worlds, the sun, Lord Brahma and all living beings still exist without any peril, proves that your husband is alive and dharma is intact. Therefore, mother, do not be afraid.

"Owing to the boon granted by you, Hanuman will not die. If that were to happen, will it not cast a slur on your chastity? Do not fear. The effects of the Brahmāstram will disappear soon. Will the thoughts of the Devas ever become false? I have seen them in the sky. They do not feel concerned. They appear to be jubilant, with folded hands over their heads, on seeing Rāma and Lakshmana lying on the battleground, as if they have seen the Supreme Trinity of Gods. Please think of everything that I have said and surmount your sea of sorrow." Relieved of her anxiety, Seeta got back her life. Looking at Tirisadai, she said, "Dear mother! Whatever you had told me before, has never gone wrong. I have lived all these days, considering you as my Goddess. I will continue to live the whole of this night. *For me, death is something that has been decided upon long ago. I have already lost an important quality called for in a woman, namely, shyness. I have also forfeited an essential ornament necessary for a married woman, namely, modesty.* I am alive only with the hope of seeing my beloved cloud-hued Rāma again. It is easy for me to get rid of this inglorious body." Seeta, whose wide vél-like eyes had pierced the body of Rāma, was held by the Rākshasis. They drove her back in the celestial chariot. *These Rākshasis looked like Yama's emissaries carrying*

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the false body (Seeta) through the sky, overtaking even destiny, while the true life (Rāma) remained below in the world.

23. MOUNTAIN OF MEDICINAL HERBS

Seeta, along with the Rākshasis, went back to the Asōka grove. In the mean time Vibheeshana returned to the battlefield with food for the vānara warriors and saw all of them severely wounded and lying as if they were dead, cursed by Brahma! He stood there dazed as though he had consumed poison. He was unaware of what had happened in the battlefield. He became perplexed and dejected. Heaving a sigh of grief, he looked as if he would die. He walked through the battlefield in the company of demons, dogs and jackals. There, he saw Rāma and Lakshmana resembling young elephants lying on the ground! *When compared to the greatness of compassion, the importance of bone, body and life is secondary. They only provide life and are mere instruments of compassion, for the sake of which (alone) they acquire importance. From this basic truth they cannot change. Vibheeshana, the proud possessor of this quality known as compassion (not understood even by the celestials) did not die because death would not come to him. Though he did not weep aloud, his heart bled for them. Still, he was without fear.* When he examined Rāma's body, and found no wounds, Vibheeshana was relieved of his anxiety. He knew that the tragedy was caused by Indrajit's Brahmāstram and that Rāma was afflicted only by his grief on seeing its effects on Lakshmana.

Pondering over how to resolve the crisis, Vibheeshana shed copious tears. He thought, "Only after Rāma regains his senses, will I know his mind. The graceful Rāma will not survive if his brother Lakshmana were to die. Can Indrajit (steeped in māya) succeed? Just as the serpent noose was earlier severed and removed, this Brahmāstram, too, will be removed and destroyed. There is no danger to the life of Rāma's brother. The vānara warriors who lie dead in the battleground will get back their lives. Can the wicked Rāvana ever be victorious in this war?" Vibheeshana then thought of finding out whether a few at least, whose help he could seek before Rāma regained his senses, were still alive. Taking a burning faggot, he sped alone in the sea of blood. On a bed of crores of carcasses of elephants, he found the fierce Hanuman with his lips drawn in, hands twisted, eyes emitting sparks of fire and shoulders touching the clouds. Looking at him Vibheeshana shed copious tears. He, however, felt that life still lingered in Hanuman. Quickly removing the arrows from his wounds

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which were oozing blood, Vibheeshana sprinkled water from the clouds on his face. The cool comfort enabled Hanuman to breathe. He began to sweat and rolled slowly. Saliva appeared in his mouth and he began to hiccup. *He was chanting Rāma's name. Watching this, the Devas became jubilant. Vibheeshana who was in tears was now full of joy! He embraced Hanuman with affection. After reciprocating his feelings, Hanuman asked Vibheeshana whether Rāma was safe. When Vibheeshana answered in the affirmative, Hanuman, fit to be extolled in the three worlds, offered silent homage to Rāma.*

Vibheeshana told Hanuman, "Rāma has swooned because of his great love for his brother. We do not know what will happen to him when he regains consciousness." Hanuman wanted to know where the unique and great Jāmbavan was. Vibheeshana replied, "I do not know where he is or whether he is dead or alive. I did not see him anywhere." Hanuman said, "Jāmbavan cannot die. He is eternal. Let us go and find him." O king of the Rākshasās, if we find Jāmbavan, he will be able to guide us." Vibheeshana and Hanuman soon found Jāmbavan, who was suffering from a combination of, distressing old age, the agony of arrows stuck in his body and the anguish of losing his friends. Mighty-shouldered Jāmbavan, was in a semi-conscious state. Hearing the footsteps of Hanuman and Vibheeshana, he wondered, "When all those who could have saved me have died fighting, who could have come to provide succour to me now? Could it be Vibheeshana or my leader, Rāma, or Hanuman, or the Devas, or the sages?" These thoughts relieved Jāmbavan of his agony. Seeing the two who came near him shedding a stream of tears, he asked them, "Who are you?" Vibheeshana exclaimed, "We have been saved by meeting you!" Jāmbavan asked, "Who is standing near you?" Hanuman replied, "I am Hanuman, come to make obeisance to you." Jāmbavan, with great joy said, "Even though we were faced with defeat initially, we all rose alive. I had known long ago, that the fierce Brahmāstram could not harm Rāma, the very embodiment of the Védas. What is he doing now?" Hanuman replied that Rāma was in 'deep sleep' owing to excessive grief. Jāmbavan said, "O mighty-shouldered Hanuman! How can Rāma bear to see Lakshmana's condition? In fact the two are one and the same, though possessing different bodies! Do not waste any more time. You must leave at once and bring the rare, life-giving medicinal herbs (known as *Sanjivi*). My dear son, if you can bring these medicinal herbs, the seventy vellam vānara warriors, Rāma and Lakshmana, the three worlds, the divine dharma, the flawless scriptures and all other good things will remain undestroyed. Take my word for it and proceed without any delay. O mighty one, after

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leaving the sea and covering a distance of nine thousand yōjanas you will reach the expansive Himalaya mountain. Cross this, traverse a distance of another nine thousand yōjanas, and you will reach the Hemakoota mountains. Later, you will find the mountain of Nidatam. After which you will come to a black mountain where the medicinal herbs are found. The herbs can bring back the lives of the dead, restore their severed limbs, remove the weapons stuck in their bodies and return the mutilated bodies to their original form. Go and bring these unique herbs. Four of them emerged when the ocean of milk was churned. In days of yore, while I was beating the victorious drum, announcing Trivikrama's achievement of containing the three worlds in two paces, the sages enlightened me on the efficacy of these herbs! They are preserved by countless deities protected by a big disc smeared with ghee and are unapproachable. However, without any anger, the deities and the disc will move away on seeing you. I am sure, you will procure these herbs because of the benefits they are going to confer."

Hanuman said, "If this is all I have to do, rest assured that all the dead ones will come to life. Please go and console our Lord Rāma." Growing into a gigantic figure, Hanuman reached the sky as if he was about to swallow it. His two shoulders expanded to the size of the eight regions. The planets and stars appeared like gem-set ornaments on him. The distance between his shoulders, was several yōjanas. His feet became wide. There was no space in Lanka for his second foot after he pressed the first. Even the vast regions were not vast enough for Hanuman to wave his hands freely. The sturdy-shouldered victorious Hanuman coiled up his tail, raised his hands, drew his lips in, pressed his great feet over the earth, broadened his chest, shrunk his neck, and sped, making Lanka appear like a ship pressed into the ocean. Hanuman's speed tore the cluster of clouds, divided the sea in two, made the eastern and western stars fall, forced the mountains and trees to rise up, and pulled the celestial chariots down, making them fall like thunder from the sky into the sea and splash its water in all directions. The severity of the gale caused by Hanuman's great leap, pushed many a big mountain to the northern side. His frightening speed, humbling the prowess of his father, Vāyu, dried up the sea and scorched the clouds as well as the big forests. With the wind and his mind left behind and the sea in front, Hanuman's body sped forward. Looking at the huge figure of Hanuman, the Devas remarked, "On a previous occasion when Hanuman exhibited his valour, he plunged the island of Lanka into an ocean of grief and removed our sorrow."

Crossing the clouds and moving outside the orbit of the sun and the moon, Hanuman sped through the sky. Going beyond the celestial stars, heaven and the

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abodes of sages, he reached the place of Lord Brahma. Some of the celestials who watched Hanuman moving through the sky, mistook him for mighty Garuda flying fast towards Lord Tirumāl. A few of the celestials thought that Lord Brahma was returning to His place, while a few others felt that none other than Lord Siva was capable of reaching such a lofty height. Some remarked that the incomprehensible Lord Tirumāl was indulging in His 'games' by changing His form, while some others commented that because Hanuman went out of sight in no time, he might also enter heaven from where none has returned so far! While a few wise ones contended that the object seen in the sky was a sort of light, a few others said it was air. A few argued that it was something formless and yet others claimed that it was the prime cause of creation which is found beyond the visible heaven! Hanuman coursed over Lord Brahma's place and touched its peak with his golden shoulders. The loud sound emanating from his body made the guards of the eight regions tremble and the earth wither. It was like the day when Trivikrama raised His divine foot to measure the earth offered by the great Mahābali. The Devas, the Siddhas and their consorts and the sages, followed Hanuman and showered fragrant, flawless sandalwood paste, flowers and gems on him. Hanuman looked like the divine karpaga tree with colourful flowers. He reached the great Himalaya mountain whose immortal sages and virtuous inhabitants blessed him with success. Then an ecstatic Hanuman saw Mount Kailas. As he folded his lotus hands and made obeisance, Lord Siva looked at him kindly and told Uma Devi, His consort, that it was the son of Vāyu. Uma Devi wanted to know why Hanuman was speeding through the sky. Lord Siva replied, "Hanuman, the emissary of Rāma, has come to fetch medicinal herbs. The sufferings of Lanka in the south will soon end. We can, along with the Devas, witness the fierce war tomorrow."

Hanuman moved fast, and reached the peaks of the Hemakoota and Nidatam mountains. *Flying faster than the speed of divine thoughts and the inward vision of wise ones, Hanuman hovered over the Meru which was like a scale for measuring the distance between the earth, the boundaries of the eight regions and Lord Brahma's Satyaloka.* Seeing Lord Brahma on a golden flowery seat on the Meru, the noble Hanúman offered worship to Him with folded hands. Later, entering a grove full of trees where the Devas sang devotional hymns and sages chanted the Védas, Hanuman saw Lord Tirumāl (adorned with a crown and a sacred garland) seated with His consort, and offered them his obeisance. Hanuman then went over the abode of Devendra who was relaxing in the shade of his moon-like umbrella. Beautiful celestial women were waving white chowries providing him with cool breeze like the *thenral,*

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while the Devas prostrated themselves at his feet. Saluting Devendra, the mighty Hanuman finally reached the Uttara Guru and saw the widespread rays of the sun, eliminating darkness. The dawn of day made him sad. He thought, "I wanted to deliver the herbs by midnight and relieve Rāma's agony even before he regained his senses. My wishes have been thwarted. The bright sun has already risen. What shall I do?" Hanuman suddenly realised that he was moving towards the north and the sun was shining to his left (in the west); and since the sun does not rise in the west, the day could not be over yet. Bearing in mind the words of the wise that the sun rose only from the right side for those moving north, Hanuman was relieved of his agony. In Uttara Guru, Hanuman saw men and women with long lives, living in amity, and engaged in virtuous deeds. *Hanuman also saw lands comparable to the Chola land irrigated by the river Kāveri.*

Hanuman who was to attain the greatness of Lord Brahma, and free himself from the chain of births, sighted the blue mountain which was as tall as Lord Tirumāl. *Crossing that mountain, Hanuman, the possessor of golden, rock-like shoulders, saw the mountain containing the herbs described by the learned Jāmbavan.* Spotting some herbs which shone brighter than sunlight, Hanuman decided that they must be the divine ones. Unable to contain his speed, he jumped on the mountain, causing it to sink towards the infernal region! The deities guarding the herbs became furious and asked him who he was and what had brought him there. Hanuman told them the purpose of his visit. They listened to him, blessed him and said, "Please take the herbs and make use of them. But do return them intact after using them." Later, a sharp-edged disc appeared before him and moved away. With his strong arms, intelligent Hanuman dug up the entire mountain containing the medicinal herbs (as he did not want to waste time trying to identify each one of them), lifted it on the palm of his hand in a trice and rose into the wide sky.

Meanwhile, Jāmbavan and Vibheeshana sped to Rāma and stroked his divine feet with their hands. Rāma's compassionate lotus-eyes which granted boons to everyone, opened like the blooming of dharma. He saw the pitiable Jāmbavan and the renowned Vibheeshana with tearful eyes steeped in agony. After asking Vibheeshana whether he had carried out the task of bringing food for the vānaras, he reassured himself that Jāmbavan was alive. Addressing them Rāma said, "Our warriors lost their lives because nothing was done to save them. O wise and truthful ones, tell me what can be done hereafter."

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With great sorrow, Rāma added, "I became concerned because of Seeta. My life, which has not been in tune with the way of the world, is full of blemishes. I did not listen to the words of my brother, spoken to me truthfully and sincerely, that the deer was an illusive one. Instead, I went to catch it. *Because I could not dispute with a woman (Seeta), this death-like hardship, along with the attendant slur, has overtaken me.* Though I met mighty Rāvana face to face and fought well, I allowed all my kin to die without snatching his life, due to the sins I committed in my previous birth. When Lakshmana wanted to use the Brahmāstram and slay the wicked Indrajit, harsh fate made me stop him as the day of my doom had drawn near. I went to perform the ritual of worshipping the weapons instead of standing close to my brother in the battlefield. Victims of their destiny, all my relatives are now dead. My brother, too, has gone away without killing Indrajit. I know it is foolish to utter words like these. It is better to die and meet all the brave dead warriors in heaven. I have lost my brother, Lakshmana, and my friends. What benefit will I derive now by destroying the Rākshasa race, killing Rāvana, and helping the Devas? With my brother dead, what is the use of anyone to me? Having lost my brother, the boundless fame that I might achieve, my virtues, my manly prowess, my beloved relatives, my friends, my dharma and the consequent reward, adherence to the scriptural discipline, good fate, or the benefits of truth — all these do not matter any more to me.

"If I am to destroy my compassion and seek victory over the Rākshasās even after seeing my brother lying dead, I can only be considered a thief and a cheat possessing the eyes of a wooden doll. Noble ones will scoff at me that I am attached to Seeta even after the death of my father and father-like Jatāyu, my friends, and Lakshmana who suffered a great deal guarding me day and night. How ridiculous it will be for me to annihilate the entire Rākshasa race, become a victor in the war, reach Ayōdhya and rule the kingdom all alone without my sweet and virtuous brother assisting me! In my present predicament, it is better that I die immediately." Jāmbavan prostrated himself at the feet of Rāma and said, "O inscrutable Lord, you appear to be unaware of your real self! As your humble devotee, I already know you well. It is not proper for me to reveal what I know because it will go against the intentions of the celestials. However, you will realise who you are. My proud Lord, it was the Brahmāstram which caused the death of the vānaras and Lakshmana by piercing their indestructible bodies. This Brahmāstram, when released, will destroy the lives of the Devas and Rākshasas alike. But, it has not affected you. Is there need for any further proof to establish your

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Godliness? I have deputed the mighty Hanuman (who has now regained his consciousness and has enough strength to relieve the sufferings of others), to bring the herbs which will restore the lives of the dead. Crossing the Himalaya and Meru mountains, Hanuman will be returning any moment. Please give up your grief. No one except my father Lord Brahma, Lord Siva, Lord Tirumāl and I know of these medicinal herbs, which arose along with the nectar of immortality during the churning of the ocean of milk. Protected by Lord Tirumāl, these jealously-guarded herbs, have not been seen, touched, or understood by anyone. The herbs are so effective that they will bring back to life all who die including Lord Brahma if He were to die! The herbs can remove the weapons stuck in the body, can reunite severed joints, and restore the damaged body to its original state. The herbs will certainly be brought. Please do not be distressed. Hanuman will bring them without any delay because divine dharma will show him the way. This is not an impossible task for him."

Pleased with Jāmbavan, Rāma said that he never doubted the truth of his words. Suddenly, a loud noise was heard. The sea rose and dashed against the shores. Mountains were split and rose into the sky. *A roaring wild wind from the north blew in at full speed. Hanuman had returned.* The cluster of stars became destabilised and even the sun embraced the moon! The clouds mingled with one another and fluttered about like a frightened herd of deer, and like a disturbed swarm of bees. Roots of trees and bunches of flowers went up and screened the sky, while mountains and trees filled the sea as they did when the Sétu was built across it. Hanuman who was furious like a tiger, roared, a roar which dispelled the agony of Rāma and the others. It sounded as if a din was being made by all animate and inanimate objects of the earth, the sky, the thunderous clouds and the seas. Hanuman resembled Garuda who had excavated the bright Mandara mountain for churning the ocean of milk. His strength excelled even that of his father, Vāyu, who had once pulled out the Trikoota mountain from Lanka. Pressing his feet down, Hanuman landed even before Jāmbavan could announce his arrival. Not willing to enter the city of the deceitful Rākshasās, the mountain of herbs stayed in the sky itself. As soon as the breeze from the herbs touched the bodies of the dead vānaras, they came to life, defeating even Yama, and appeared brighter than ever before. As the corpses of the Rākshasās had perished in the indestructible sea, they did not come back to life. The bodies lying in ships and other places, and all the vānaras were, however, restored to life. The long arrows came out of the body of Lakshmana and his painful burning wounds healed. His red eyes started moving. They looked around and silently worshipped the whole world. Young Lakshmana regained consciousness. The vānara warriors sat up raising an uproar. On

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hearing this, the Devas offered their felicitations. Lakshmana got up like the red-eyed Tirumāl coming out of His meditation!

Lakshmana was embraced by Rāma who swelled with joy. The immortal Devas were freed from their anxiety. Vices were removed from the world. The celestial dancers danced. Musical instruments including the stringed kinnaram made sweet music. The entire world celebrated this jubilant event ecstatically. Along with the chanting of the Védas by the sages, the contents of the sacred books roared. The waves of the seas boomed. The hearts of the rejoicing Devas, became cool. After everyone came alive, the Brahmāstram went around Rāma, the graceful archer, worshipped him, extolled him for having brought credit to himself by revealing the truth, and then left the place. Rāma, the unique lord, was relieved of his agony. With tears in his eyes and amidst the jubilation expressed by the Devas, he affectionately hugged Hanuman who was more compassionate than even a mother. When Rāma (who had embraced the kunkumam-smeared bosom of Seeta) embraced Hanuman, the latter paid homage to him at his divine feet.

Rāma told Hanuman, "We have been living all along without deviating from the path of truth laid down by our forefathers. After being born as the sons of Dasaratha who died of the grief caused by me, we were killed by the Brahmāstram. O great and virtuous Hanuman, we are born again, because of you. When help is rendered to a person in the throes of death, will it be adequate even if the beneficiary gave back his life in return? How can we repay you who saved us from blemish, from our great enemies and protected our dynasty and the Védas? *The momentary humiliation we suffered was worthwhile, because it brought out our brotherly love.* You who will live beyond pralaya have helped us in time. Otherwise, all the seven worlds would have been destroyed. Even after the Brahmāstram was shot, you saved everyone and extended their life here with us. I bless you, my saviour, to live for ever without disease or hardship." All those whose lives were prolonged through the charity of Hanuman and everyone else, fondly surrounded him and offered him their homage while Hanuman narrated his experience to them in detail. Addressing Hanuman, Jāmbavan said, "Please go and replace the mountain in its original place. If not, the death of the deceitful Rākshasās may be negated." Hailing Jāmbavan's advice and feeling confident that he could go and return within a nāzhigai, the great Hanuman carried the huge and divine mountain on his shoulders and left.

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24. JUBILATION

Let us now narrate the events that took place in Rāvana's palace. Thinking that his enemies had perished, Rāvana was in great ecstasy. The celestial singers sang classical music. Peacock-complexioned young damsels, with fish-like eyes, danced exuberantly. Rāvana watched all this and enjoyed himself. Celestial beauties, Vidyādhara women possessing beautiful bosoms, Siddha women with sweet voices and countless other women who could put to shame a bevy of peacocks, arrived at Rāvana's palace. Menaka and Tilottamai possessing sharp sword-like eyes and Rambha and Oorvasi lisping words sweeter than honey, came to Rāvana's palace dancing all the way with their anklets tinkling to the accompaniment of drums and conches. These women wore ornate, dangling, golden ear-rings and vermilion on their foreheads. They had pearly teeth and crimson mouths. Their red eyes, resembling 'thorny' lotuses, made their faces look like the early morning sunlight. Even the engulfing darkness would succumb to their glowing bodies, like the minds of men who saw them! *Like treacherous thoughts pervading the minds of those resistant to sound advice, the minds of these women became intoxicated with the liquor they had consumed.* They smiled differently and sweated profusely. Their delicate crimson waists throbbed. Their teeth shone like jasmine-buds. The corners of their vél-like deadly eyes became red. Their curly tresses looked like beautiful clouds. When the ornaments around their waists slipped down to their anklets, these intoxicated women wondered whether somebody had encircled their ankles! Like Manmatha giving up his task of shooting floral arrows from his quiver, these drunken women with sleepy eyes gave up their task of singing properly. Their songs were out of tune with the beat of cymbals. They who normally sang with a flute-like sweet voice, now sang awkwardly in a harsh tone and without any rhythm, producing the effect of sour toddy mixed with sweet nectar. Feminine dancers, who wanted to portray an elephant through their movements, could only bring out the image of despicable creatures living underneath stones, because they were drunk. The women assembled in Rāvana's palace were so intoxicated that they would weep, laugh, sing and dance as they liked, 'worship' bystanders with folded hands, sleep, jump and get exhausted, allow the liquor to flow from their red mouths, lean on one another out of fatigue and shut their blood-red eyes and yawn. These women indicated through the movement of their limbs, their desire for carnal pleasures, inducing a flood of passion even among flawless sages. The drunken women appeared like frightened deer. Their bright

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black eyes turned red, and their red lotus-like lips turned white as if to warn the Rākshasās of the impending peril.

While lustful Rāvana was sitting proudly and witnessing the antics of the drunken women who gave pearly smiles, the loud clamour of the vast vānara army entered his ears making him lose his nerve. For Rāvana, the dances of women with coral lips, their songs sweeter than nectar, the exquisite beat of the mridangams, the slanting looks of women, their lisping words and all other things lost their beauty like withered flowers, the moment the clamour entered his ears. On hearing the twanging of the divine bows of Rāma and Lakshmana, rogue-elephants broke the posts to which they were tied and trembled with fear, horses with thick manes became subdued and the Rākshasās shuddered. The flock of women who were attacking men with spear-like eyes and smiling with pearly teeth, started looking like a herd of monkeys. Rāvana's mind was disturbed like the ocean of milk churned by the Mandara mountain. The ten bright moons, namely the faces of Rāvana, became dull like the diurnal moon. At this stage, spies in the guise of bees entered Rāvana's garland and whispered in his ears about what had taken place at the front. On learning that his enemies had eluded death, Rāvana was upset. He withdrew from the shamiana decorated with divine flowers and went to the chamber for ministerial consultations.

25. MĀYĀ SEETA

Rāvana was surrounded by minister, commanders like Mahodaran, elderly scholars, advisers and others. He told them about their unhappy predicament. Mālyavan looked at Rāvana and said, "If you had not thrown the corpses of our warriors into the sea, all of them would have regained their lives. Now that the Dishāpālakas have become ineffective, what is there to stop the destruction of our army? It is clear that leaving from Lanka, going beyond the Mere, and bridging the [illegible] along with the combatants is unique feat of mighty Hanumān and [illegible] of the supreme God. Who will remain alive, now, if the inhabitants of Lanka [illegible] Indeed, men present and absent, [illegible] the world. How can the [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

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inclusion of Hanuman who wears a hero's anklets! At least now let us send Seeta back in a fitting manner and surrender to the righteous Rāma and Lakshmana. All those mighty Rākshasās capable of drinking the tidal sea and excavating the terrestrial and celestial worlds are dead. Except the city of Lanka, you, and your son Indrajit, none has survived! All our prowess is of no use. *Realise that Rāma killed Vāli with a single arrow and dispatched him to heaven. Rāma caused a Sétu to be built across the sea full of water and killed Kumbhakarna. Can Rāma be defeated by Rākshasās who will perish like water bubbles made by drops of rain?"*

Annoyed with Māliyavān, Rāvana looked at him with fiery eyes and said, "Even though the Rākshasās are dead and our weapons have been destroyed, my hand holding the sword is in good shape. I did not take Seeta captive to set her free. What is the use of Indrajit or others? Those who are frightened and keen to preserve their lives, are at liberty to leave this place. By tomorrow, I will, with the fury of pralaya, destroy the army of monkeys and those men." Indrajit intervened and said, "If you are inclined to listen to me, I have a few things to tell you. The powerful Brahmāstram given to me by Lord Brahma was worshipped by me with the light of the lamp and shot with the object of killing Rāma also. Strangely the dart returned without touching his body. He is neither a man, nor a troublesome Deva, nor even a great sage. As truly explained by Vibheeshana, Rāma is the Supreme Lord who is always in the minds of those who have conquered thoughts of 'I' and 'Mine'. To talk about the unique Godly state of Rāma now, does not do justice to our valour. O hero! Please do not be concerned about those killed in the battle. If I can go to the temple of Nikumbalai and complete my yāga for the removal of all our agonies, your sufferings will also end." Rāvana agreed. The good son, Indrajit, however, cautioned, "Prompted by Vibheeshana, our enemies may come to Nikumbalai and prevent the success of the yāga." Rāvana wanted to know how they could be stopped. Indrajit replied, "We must create a Seeta, take her before lofty Hanuman in the battlefield, 'kill' her there and declare that I will be proceeding with a big army to attack Ayōdhya. Thereafter, if we pretend to move towards Ayōdhya, Rāma and Lakshmana will think that Seeta is dead and give up fighting. They will conclude that all their brothers, relatives and the people of Ayōdhya will be killed by me. With unbearable sorrow, they will go with their army to Ayōdhya. Even otherwise, they will send Hanuman there to investigate. By then, I will complete the yāga, go with my fierce army, kill all of them and secure victory for you." Rāvana accepted this suggestion, and Indrajit immediately left to create the illusory Seeta.

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25. MĀYA SEETA

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inclusion of Hanuman who wears a hero's anklets! At least now let us send Seeta back in a fitting manner and surrender to the righteous Rāma and Lakshmana. All those mighty Rākshasās capable of drinking the tidal sea and excavating the terrestrial and celestial worlds are dead. Except the city of Lanka, you, and your son Indrajit, none has survived! All our prowess is of no use. *Realise that Rāma killed Vāli with a single arrow and dispatched him to heaven. Rāma caused a Sétu to be built across the sea full of water and killed Kumbhakarna. Can Rāma be defeated by Rākshasās who will perish like water bubbles made by drops of rain?"*

Annoyed with Māliyavān, Rāvana looked at him with fiery eyes and said, "Even though the Rākshasās are dead and our weapons have been destroyed, my hand holding the sword is in good shape. I did not take Seeta captive to set her free. What is the use of Indrajit or others? Those who are frightened and keen to preserve their lives, are at liberty to leave this place. By tomorrow, I will, with the fury of pralaya, destroy the army of monkeys and those men." Indrajit intervened and said, "If you are inclined to listen to me, I have a few things to tell you. The powerful Brahmāstram given to me by Lord Brahma was worshipped by me with the light of the lamp and shot with the object of killing Rāma also. Strangely the dart returned without touching his body. He is neither a man, nor a troublesome Deva, nor even a great sage. As truly explained by Vibheeshana, Rāma is the Supreme Lord who is always in the minds of those who have conquered thoughts of 'I' and 'Mine'. To talk about the unique Godly state of Rāma now, does not do justice to our valour. O hero! Please do not be concerned about those killed in the battle. If I can go to the temple of Nikumbalai and complete my yāga for the removal of all our agonies, your sufferings will also end." Rāvana agreed. The good son, Indrajit, however, cautioned, "Prompted by Vibheeshana, our enemies may come to Nikumbalai and prevent the success of the yāga." Rāvana wanted to know how they could be stopped. Indrajit replied, "We must create a Seeta, take her before lofty Hanuman in the battlefield, 'kill' her there and declare that I will be proceeding with a big army to attack Ayōdhya. Thereafter, if we pretend to move towards Ayōdhya, Rāma and Lakshmana will think that Seeta is dead and give up fighting. They will conclude that all their brothers, relatives and the people of Ayōdhya will be killed by me. With unbearable sorrow, they will go with their army to Ayōdhya. Even otherwise, they will send Hanuman there to investigate. By then, I will complete the yāga, go with my fierce army, kill all of them and secure victory for you." Rāvana accepted this suggestion, and Indrajit immediately left to create the illusory Seeta.

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In the mean time Sugreeva met Rāma and said, "Let us demolish the ancient city of Lanka and destroy its greatness." On Rāma's approval, Sugreeva leapt on the tower of the city and reached its peak. Seventy vellam vānaras, each with a burning faggot, followed him. When crores of these vānaras jumped on the well-guarded walls of the fort, humiliating the old city of Lanka, they looked like white clouds with flashes of lightning. The impeccable army of vānaras, as sturdy as elephants, took burning wooden sticks and hurled them in all directions. They fell down like stars falling from the sky in the middle of the night, as if to portend the impending destruction of Lanka. They fell again and again on the city as fiercely as the red Agni-astram which the furious Rāma had once shot at the sea. Frightening the guards of the wide fort walls, the thick red fire spread all around. The burning city of Lanka looked like the burning sea attacked by the arrows of Rāma. Like shrieking birds flying out of their nests during a forest fire, the wailing Rākshasās came out of their houses. Rāma the great archer shot lamp-like arrows which made the tower of the city tumble down like a falling hill. While this was happening in Lanka, the heroic Hanuman replaced the mountain with its medicinal herbs and returned with a loud clamour.

Indrajit, a master of sorcery and conqueror of Yama, reached the western gate where the fierce-eyed Hanuman was seen. Showing him the illusory Seeta, Indrajit told him furiously, "You are fighting for the sake of Seeta. My father Rāvana has been careless so far. I shall now kill this woman." Hanuman took her to be the Seeṭa he had seen. He became lifeless and thought, "Our lives have come to an end. Showing the just path to Indrajit is the right thing to do." Hanuman told Indrajit, "You are born in a flawless race. You possess qualities of virtue. Killing a woman is wrong. You are the fourth descendant of the four-headed Lord Brahma. You have delved deep into books. Are you not attracting a great blemish by killing a doe-like, innocent woman? Take pity on me and listen to me. The entire world will be yours. You are unaware of the greatness of your ancestry. Attempting to do a mean deed will destroy your fame. Mortals and immortals hold you in dread. My mind is disturbed because you have cast away the quality of mercy. Killing a woman is the gravest of sins." Ignoring Hanuman's pleadings, Indrajit furiously told him, "I will kill this woman with my sword to save my father and those in Lanka. I will make the vānaras run away in fear." Looking at the vānaras, Indrajit said, "You monkeys! This Seeta is dead. If possible, get back to Ayōdhya, and at least try to save that city. I will proceed to Ayōdhya, scorch it and return immediately. Even if the celestials try to stop me, neither the brothers, Bharata and Satrughna, nor the mothers, Kausalaya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra, will survive. I will destroy all of them with my fiery arrows which will pierce through

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them instantly, making it impossible for them to escape. I will at once leave for Ayōdhya in this flowery celestial chariot." On hearing these words, the 'humble' fake Seeta 'appealed' to Indrajit and 'cried' repeatedly, "My lord! Be merciful!" Indrajit, however, mercilessly 'slew' 'Seeta' with his sword, and left in his chariot accompanied by his vast army.

Indrajit pretended to go north. Seeing this, Hanuman was shocked and fell down like a mighty mountain. After a while, Indrajit deviated from his northerly course and reached Nikumbalai, the site for his proposed yāga. The virtuous Hanuman became weary with anguish. He lost his great strength. Thinking of Seeta, he cried, "O swan! O my mother! O gem among women!" He then asked whether there was no God at all and lamented aloud, "Even after seeing Seeta cut into bits, my accursed heart and life have not been destroyed." He fell exhausted. He tried to rise and leap. He sobbed in great agony and became despondent. He heaved a hot fiery sigh. He knocked his head on the ground. He wailed aloud and said, "I was hoping that the three worlds were about to have a bright period. But I see a flood of agony surrounding them. Deceit has triumphed. Wicked Indrajit has slain Seeta. Dharma has disappeared. After seeing the chaste and noble Seeta slain, I am unable to do anything. I have become powerless like a bird that has lost its wings. I am a captive in the strong prison of agony! How 'merciful' is my destiny that I am helpless even after seeing Indrajit slay this noble woman! Earlier, I had returned from Lanka as the proud and laudable emissary of Lord Rāma. But now I have come here neither to achieve victory over the Rākshasās nor to free Seeta from her prison. I have become responsible for Seeta's death by allowing her to be slain by this fierce Indrajit. Thereby I have brought great disgrace on myself.

"When Rāma was not able to find Seeta and was about to end his life, I consoled him with the words that I had seen exquisite Seeta. But now, I have to announce that Seeta is dead, killed by Indrajit. Wonderful indeed is the purpose of my birth. *I leapt over the insurmountable sea. I burnt the city of Lanka. I helped in building a sétu across the sea. I crossed the unique Meru and brought the mountain with the medicinal herbs. I was proud to hear that there was no monkey comparable to me. But now, my services to Rāma have been wasted like a medicinal plant dissolved in the huge sea.* Even after seeing Indrajit severing the body of Seeta, I dithered about killing him. I have not given up my despicable life either. It is shameful indeed that I still want to eat and live. The deceitful Indrajit said that he would be invading Ayōdhya. There are also indications to that effect. If I follow him, Rāma will not know what happened to

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Seeta here. I, too, will not know what is going to happen hereafter, or what I should do henceforth. Let me tell Rāma all that took place here. I will find out his views and act accordingly. If he dies after listening to my narration of events, I will die with him. Let this be my final decision. There is nothing else I can do." With hot tears, leonine Hanuman went and fell like a mountain at Rāma's divine feet, with pain in his limbs and with agony in his mind. Rāma the great warrior, bent down, raised Hanuman to his feet and asked him to speak out. Hanuman could not bear his grief any longer. He told Rāma that Indrajit had slain sorrowful Seeta with a sword. Hanuman then rolled on the ground and wept bitterly. On hearing the words of Hanuman, Rāma's heart did not beat. He did not breathe. His eyes did not blink. He did not shed tears, nor did he speak. He was not heart-broken, he neither rolled on the ground, nor wept. He did not even sweat. None, including the Devas could gauge the depth of Rāma's grief!

The vānara warriors were shocked. Shaken like trees caught in a storm, they lost their senses. They fell at the divine lotus feet of charitable Rāma who resembled the celestial karpaga tree. *The heroic Rāma lost his senses and was like a lifeless painting. He did not look at his own wise counsellors. Even when Lakshmana enquired what the matter was, he did not speak. The sword of deep love, pierced his bosom. He fell down like a corpse.* Lakshmana saw Rāma lying unconscious and realised the humiliation caused to them and how everything, including dharma had gone astray. Lakshmana's mouth, mind and body, showed signs of fatigue. He fell down like a calf which had lost its mother. Even the wise Vibheeshana, who could see far ahead, trembled and suffered boundless agony. He did not understand anything. He thought that Indrajit, unable to vanquish Rāma and Lakshmana, probably slew Seeta because she was the cause of the destruction of the Pulastya dynasty. He sprinkled cool water on Rāma's face, touched his body and did everything to restore him to his senses. He gently rubbed Rāma's divine feet, palms and body. Rāma slowly opened his eyes.

Lakshmana, who had fallen on the ground, shed tears in despair and could not console himself. Fearing that Rāma would not be able to tolerate his humiliation, Lakshmana, despite his fatigue, attempted to comfort him, and said, "In times of great peril, ordinary persons may allow themselves to be submerged in a sea of sorrow. But such conduct from you will bring you great dishonour. If our dynasty is to be considered flawless, you should not permit your destruction out of desolation. Instead, you must demolish the world along with dharma! Even after learning that a treacherous Rākshasa has managed to touch and kill Goddess Lakshmi (your chaste ascetic wife who was tender and helpless), you waste your

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time grieving. Is it because of your desire to remain alive, or your compassion for your enemies, or your affinity towards dharma? *Irrespective of whether the Rākshasās, Devas, brahmins, preceptors, sages, scriptural tenets and the rest are your enemies or not, if they kill virtuous persons, how ridiculous it is to remain inert without burning the three worlds? Should the Devas continue to live? Should we revere dharma imagining that it still exists? Must the clouds continue to shower rain? Should we feel depressed and weep?* Wonderful indeed is our archery! We have the prowess to enter and scorch the city of Lanka, reduce it to ashes in a moment, and burn all the regions through which Indrajit traversed, including heaven. If we are to shed tears and hold our heads in sorrow, will it not demean us in the eyes of the world? *Even in Ayōdhya we gave up our right to rule, and reached the forest, respecting dharma. Though Seeta was abducted by Rāvana, we lived without transgressing dharma. If we are to be tormented like this and live a worthless life, even here in Lanka, our weakness may make others treat us as shackled slaves. If we try to end our lives out of unbearable grief, the world will condemn us, proclaiming that Rāma died out of shame, unable to slay those who slew his beautiful wife in his very presence. Inaction is wrong. Why should you grieve like one who is senseless?"* Sugreeva who was depressed, rose up as if from a dream and called upon his vānara warriors to go and jump on the chest of Rāvana who had made Seeta suffer.

Sugreeva said, "We must excavate Lanka and kill the cruel Rākshasās along with their Rākshasis, their children and their entire clan. If the Devas interfere in our harsh fight, we will pull even the celestial world down to the ground." The sturdy, diamond-shouldered Sugreeva added, "Why should we lament, fearing that we would be responsible for the destruction of dharma? Let us fight the three worlds and destroy even the Devas." As Sugreeva got ready to leap into Lanka, the other vānaras shouted, "We will leap towards Lanka even before our king, and throw out the Rākshasās from their homes." *When they were about to do so, Hanuman told Rāma of Indrajit's plan to invade Ayōdhya. The moment Rāma heard that Indrajit was on his way to Ayōdhya where his mothers and brothers were praying for him, his grief for Seeta disappeared like the pain of an ulcer before the pain of a burn caused by fire.* As if Lord Tirumāl had woken up from His divine sleep and risen from the ocean of milk, Rāma came out of the sea of anguish caused by Seeta's death. At the same time, Rāma was deeply affected by the flame of anger. He told Vibheeshana, "My sufferings have not ended

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with Seeta. They are deep-rooted. I do not know whether they will continue, and whether I have enough time to conquer these sufferings. Will my brothers be spared? Indrajit has gone in a vimānam faster than the speed of mind and will return in a moment after finishing the task he has undertaken. *Ayōdhya the birth-place of this sinful person will be reduced to dust.* With Seeta dead here and with death eluding me, I do not know what is in store for me. My cruel fate does not end with making me a Yama for my father Dasaratha, my father-like Jatāyu and Seeta in solitude, but has extended to my innocent mothers, my flawless brothers, my native city and my country. My brothers, Bharata and Satrughna, are totally ignorant of all that has happened here. If they come to know later of these happenings, they may become furious with Indrajit who may probably kill them with the Nāgapāsam. Neither will Garuda come to their rescue nor will Hanuman be there to bring the herbs to save them. Dear Vibheeshana with diamond-like shoulders! Please suggest a method of reaching Ayōdhya quickly. Let me not concern myself with the war in Lanka, or what I have to do here in future. Only after the crows peck and eat the eyes of that cruel Indrajit, will I return to this place and execute my plans."

Lakshmana looking at Rāma said, "Indrajit who has gone to Ayōdhya, is incapable of shooting his arrows at Bharata in the battlefield. If Bharata moves close to his enemies and fights with them, will not the three worlds be burnt? You need not drown yourself in a sea of sorrow. Please listen to me. The deceptive Indrajit, the embodiment of vices, shot the Brahmāstram and bound me. That was because I was not Bharata. He would never have allowed himself to be bound like me. You will see Indrajit, hit by Bharata, inviting Yama and falling dead on the ground with his Rākshasa clan." Looking at Rāma, Hanuman said, "O Lord, climb onto my shoulders or my palms, so that I can take you to Ayōdhya faster than the wind. I will also, on my own, go and destroy the enemy. I pleaded with Indrajit not to kill Seeta. All my sober words were in vain. After he killed Seeta, I was in agony and fell unconscious on the ground, and he left at once. I failed in my duty. Otherwise, could that wicked Rākshasa have escaped alive? I will overtake Indrajit's chariot and reach Ayōdhya ahead of him. Why delay? Please climb onto my shoulders before his chariot reaches Ayōdhya." In response to Hanuman's call, Rāma and Lakshmana got up, but they were stopped by Vibheeshana who said, "Overcome by sorrow and despondency, I lost my powers of perception. Now I see that it was all māya! If chaste Seeta had been killed by wicked Indrajit, the three worlds would have been scorched and reduced to ashes. But this has not happened. The news that Indrajit has gone to Ayōdhya is strange! Within a short

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while, we will be able to know the truth. I will immediately go to the place where Seeta is. I will patiently see things for myself and return. Only then should we decide on the future course of action." Vibheeshana's suggestion was accepted by Rāma. Taking the form of a bee and moving through the sky, Vibheeshana reached the Asōka grove. There he saw Seeta who was like a painted picture making one wonder whether there was life in her or not. She who felt that her sufferings would end only with her death, was consoled only by Tirisadai's sweet words. The thunderous clamour raised by the vānaras, acted as nectar to her. As a result, she held on to her life. Vibheeshana realised that Indrajit had left for Nikumbalai to perform the yāga. He saw countless Rākshasa armies marching in, one behind the other. The 'slaying of Seeta' was a ploy! He cast away his gloom and became happy. At the same time he also saw the concern of the Devas at the collection of materials like the plough, firewood and ghee for the yāga, the successful culmination of which would keep them all under subjugation for a long time. *"What a reward for all deceitful acts!" he exclaimed to himself. He then returned to Rāma. Falling at his divine feet, Vibheeshana told him, "I have seen Seeta with my own eyes. How can there be any peril for the chaste Seeta who is like Arundati?* After torturing us with his acts of deception, Indrajit has entered Nikumbalai to perform a yāga to destroy us totally." The vānaras became happy that Seeta was alive. They sprang up, jumped and danced merrily, smashing the hills. They raised a clamour as loud as the collective clamour of the seven worlds, seven big islands and the seven seas that arose during pralaya!

26. YĀGA AT NIKUMBALAI

Rāma was relieved of his anxiety. Embracing Vibheeshana happily, he asked him, "Is it difficult for me to get rid of my sorrow when I have with me companions like you and Hanuman, along with my penance and God?" Vibheeshana said to him, "If Indrajit is allowed to complete the yāga, no one will be able to defeat him and victory will be on the side of those Rākshasās. Please allow me to go with Lakshmana, snatch his life and destroy his yāga." Rāma agreed, turned to Lakshmana, embraced him and said, "If Indrajit once again shoots the Brahmāstram at you, move away from it; but do not dispatch the Brahmāstram at him, for it will destroy heaven and earth. O renowned hero, he might use a combination of Sivāstram and Pāsupatāstram dedicated to Lord Siva, and Nārāyanāstram dedicated to Lord Tirumāl. If he does so, dispatch identical darts, consume his life with the strength of your bow, and return. Try to understand

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the acts of sorcery practised by him and destroy them completely. *Be guided by dharma.* Use different methods of combat. At the opportune moment when he is exhausted, kill Indrajit who is a Yama to the Devas. If, out of confusion and anger, he showers arrows of different kinds, dispatch similar ones, and counter them. Even before his arrow hits you, dispatch an arrow at him. Act swiftly like the wind, study the arrows used by him, and shoot appropriate arrows to neutralise them."

Rāma thus explained the subtleties of war to Lakshmana who fully grapsed them. Looking at the strong Lakshmana and giving him a bow, Rāma said, "This is the bow which was once held by Lord Nārāyana. May you achieve victory with it. Did not the Tamil sage, Agastya, whom you heard with attention, speak of its greatness to you? This trusted bow of Lord Tirumāl was sought and obtained by Lord Brahma in a yāga. Please take it." Rāma gave the bow along with the quiver and armour to Lakshmana. Tendering several words of advice and embracing him, Rāma bade him farewell. The Devas announced that their sufferings were over. The celestial women sang songs wishing Lakshmana, who looked like Lord Siva rising with fury to burn Tripura, a long life. Rāma asked him to proceed along with Hanuman and other leaders. *Lakshmana, whose wealth was his dharma, paid his respects through his mind and head to Rāma whose face resembled a beautiful cloud.* Rāma shed tears as he stood watching Lakshmana leave for Nikumbalai holding the bow he gave him, in his left hand, and proclaiming furiously that he would bring the head of Indrajit. *Lakshmana had never before left Rāma. The two were inseparable like the life and its body. When Lakshmana left, Rāma looked like Dasaratha watching and longing for his young son, Rāma, who had gone along with Sage Viswāmitra to protect his great yāga.*

The vānara warriors, holding burning sticks in their hands, crossed the forests and mountains and reached Nikumbalai. There they saw a banyan tree similar to the one under which Lord Tirumāl used to rest! Lakshmana and others watched the black sea of Rākshasās halting beneath the lofty, sprawling tree and also an ocean-like army in circular array protecting wicked Indrajit's yāga. Cloud-like tuskers, horses, chariots and infantry, numbering a thousand crores, stood together spread over several yōjanas. The number of divisions of the army consisting of golden chariots, horses and elephants, was beyond reckoning. The formation of these divisions under the direction of Indrajit, was like the huge world surrounded by the sea. The long crimson shining locks of hair on the heads of the black Rākshasās, made Nikumbalai look like the dark sea once scorched by Rāma's arrow. The bows in the hands of the Rākshasās, were

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silent like the rainbow in the sky. *The musical instruments of the Rākshasās, too, remained silent like the silent creatures in the sea. The huge war–drums were silent like thunderless clouds. Rāma's untiring, able, vānaras assembled like a silent sea, moved stealthily, reached the silent army camp, and suddenly raised a clamour which rent the sky.* There was a counter-clamour from the army of Rākshasās who began beating their decorated drums. The vānara warriors hurled stones at the Rākshasa army. The Rākshasās showered arrows on the vānaras like torrential rains from moist clouds. Resembling a row of swans resting on a lake full of water, the vānaras sat on the Rākshasās who attacked them with lustrous weapons. The bows, tridents, curved clubs, teeth, heads and bodies of the Rākshasās fell scattered on the ground, before the fierce attack by the monkeys with their fists, trees and stones. In turn, the tails, heads, bodies, bellies, legs and hands of the monkeys hit by the Rākshasās with their clubs, axes, curved sticks, hoops and arrows, were severed and thrown on the ground.

Vibheeshana asked Lakshmana, "If this well-guarded yāga is not shattered soon, when do we defeat this sea of an army?" The Devas, four-headed Brahma, ageless Lord Siva, Lord Tirumāl and other celestials arrived to witness the war. All the four types of armies were ready for the attack. Rows of chariots stood in front. Behind the cavalry were rows of infantry full of Rākshasās with teeth resembling white crescent moons. The army of elephants was accompanied by different musical instruments. *Lakshmana entered the army of Rākshasās, showered a rain of sharp arrows and dispatched them to the abode of Yama. A hundred thousand intoxicated rutting elephants, chariots and horses were all crushed and thrown into a heap.* Rākshasās were sliced into pieces and were made to float in the sea of blood. In the huge pits created by the legs of beautiful elephants in the battleground, the garland-adorned fiery Rākshasa heads with red hair fell scattered. The whole scene resembled the yāga pit from which fire rose with bright flames. Though blood flowed copiously from the rutting elephants, they neither moved nor died. They looked like mountains surrounded by ponds. The Rākshasa commanders' crowned heads pierced by Lakshmana's arrows, resembled snake holes covered by fireflies. *The long creepers that fell into the river of Rākshasa blood looked like big clouds falling into the deep sea.* The royal white umbrellas which were cut by Lakshmana's lustrous arrows, fell into the flood of blood and resembled the moon devoured by the red serpent Rāhu.

Fierce elephants, with their trunks and legs severed, were carried away by the flood of blood. *As they were lifeless, they merely floated instead of sinking, and*

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resembled ships sailing on the sea. Attracted by the scent of dead elephants, black jackals entered the front. The drums deserted by the fleeing Rākshasās, looked like stacks of corpses. The fiery, poison-tipped arrows that pierced the flesh of the necks of elephants, looked like fire spreading in a bamboo forest on a long mountain. The bears of the vānara army, pressed forward and knocked off the gem-set crowns worn by the sea of Rākshasās. Wherever the limbs of defeated commanders were cut and torn by Lakshmana's powerful arrows, copious blood flowed into which vultures plunged and washed their bodies. *Long ago, Dasaratha, the father of Lakshmana, moving in a solitary chariot had fought and opposed several enemy chariots and killed the big army of Asuras. Similarly, Dasaratha's son, Lakshmana, all alone, showered a rain of arrows and destroyed the army of Rākshasās who opposed him that day. The heads and bodies of the Rākshasās severed by Lakshmana's arrows, fell into the hot yāga pit like the mountains, clouds and stars displaced during pralaya. The crowned heads of the Rākshasās sundered by Lakshmana's arrows, fell down from the sky and broke the holy water-pot sanctified by hymns and kept in the square yāga-mound.* The blood flowing from the wounds of the enemy formed a river, carrying with it elephants driven with goads and Rākshasa heads with red eyes, and flowed into the yāga pit, extinguishing the sacrificial fire. When Lakshmana's arrows sliced the big Rākshasa hands, their swords fell like thunder and killed the buffaloes and goats kept near the yāga pit as sacrificial offerings.

The scorching, lustrous, arrows shot by Lakshmana fell again and again on the nervous Rākshasās who trembled with fear. Their legs were severed. They used their spears in great agony to support themselves. Some of the Rākshasās continued to fight (pushing into position their bowels which had come out through their backs) because they were unable to leave their sons whose bodies were sundered in the battlefield. Lakshmana's arrows severed the heads of crores of Rākshasās. Several groups of these headless trunks danced, breaking pots of ghee, toddy and fried rice. *Pervading the enemy camp with the swiftness of wind, with the speed of venom, like a weaver's thread, like a disease, like the curd in milk, Lakshmana knocked down the warriors along with their spears.* Indrajit saw his huge army as big as the tidal sea, destroyed on the wide earth, like a grove laid waste by stormy winds. In that battlefield, he could see nothing but corpses of mighty rutting elephants, dead wild horses, ruined chariots, severed Rākshasa bodies and heads, and the rising sea of blood. When Indrajit looked at the heaps of corpses of crores of heroic Rākshasās, cut into pieces by Lakshmana's sharp arrows, he could not see a single whole body. Some of the Rākshasās who were

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more deadly than poison, unable to withstand Lakshmana's onslaught, came to Indrajit trembling with fear and with parched tongues. Some of the more furious Rākshasās died in despair with none to help them. The fire in the oblation pit where the yāga was being performed was extinguished. The bag containing the sacrificial grass and other materials required for the yāga was torn. *At this juncture Indrajit forgot to recite the hymns for the yāga and remained dull like the smoke-engulfed oblation fire on the verge of extinction.* The Rākshasās who survived, stood around Indrajit. Even before a syllable was uttered, their vast sea-like army was destroyed by the sea of vānaras. Lakshmana's great archery and his own agony and frustration at not having been able to complete the yāga, depressed Indrajit.

The shivering of Mother Earth as a result of Lakshmana's massacre and the perishing of the Rākshasa race were seen by the Rākshasa sages conducting the yāga, and their hands trembled. Indrajit saw this. *With his honour lost, with his concentration gone, with his army of boundless might and valour destroyed, and his chanting of hymns and the performance of all other rituals disturbed, Indrajit said to himself, "Out of twenty-five vellam Rākshasās, only ten have survived. Even these will perish due to fatigue. It would be childish to pursue the yāga any longer."* The extinction of the yāga fire was by itself an omen enough to indicate that in the fierce battle on that day, victory would not be on the side of the Rākshasās. *Indrajit said to himself, "Leaving aside the question of bad omens, it is a shame to think that I do not have enough prowess to oppose these ordinary human beings, Rāma and Lakshmana. My shoulders have not disappeared. I can engage them in a furious battle. My sorrow at the sight of the destruction of the yāga might prompt the Devas to think poorly of me. They may conclude that I am not strong enough to oppose a human and that my valour is adequate only to defeat Devendra!"* The monkeys in the mean time hurled trees, big rocks, heaps of corpses and dead elephants at Indrajit's army, making it run helter-skelter. Those who remained, stood one behind the other to protect themselves and trembled with fear. The Rākshasās whose bowels came out and whose bodies were torn by Lakshmana's arrows, were relieved of their anger and were like elephants which become calm after the cessation of their rutting. *The wild arrows shot by Lakshmana and the black rocks hurled by the monkeys fell on the vast Rākshasa army, like a downpour into the black sea.*

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The huge army of Rākshasās, ran away destabilised by the attack of Hanuman with trees. *Arousing Indrajit's anger, Hanuman said, "We have found out your army which was hiding in this place. Did you not hear the twang of our bows? Could you not have come for the fight? After reaching Ayōdhya and 'killing' Bharata and his relatives, when did you return and finish the yāga?* Have you reaped its benefits? Did you meet the mighty-shouldered flawless king Bharata and successfully exhibit your prowess? The unique Dasaratha had slain Camparāsura who had conquered Devendra. Among Dasaratha's four sons, Rāma is the eldest and Satrughna is the youngest. Did you meet the latter and show him the might of your bow? Lakshmana's fiery, sturdy, diamond-like arrows have pierced you. Red blood flows from your body, ears, mouth and eyes. Will not your strategy of hiding yourself in Lanka and indulging in sorcery come to an end today? Enough of our trembling with fear at the Nāgapāsam, or the Brahmāstram of Lord Brahma, or the Pāsupatāstram of Lord Siva, or the Cakra (Disc) of Lord Tirumāl that you hope to use against us! Realise that Yama has approached you. We have firmly decided to pluck your head along with your life, even after knowing of the boons secured by you, your ability to employ sorcery, and the fact that you have been rewarded by Gods with deadly and divine darts. Even if the Trinity of Gods protect you, you are certain to die in this war. Are not your left eye and shoulder throbbing? Do you still hope to live? *Lakshmana, the great archer, has already taken a pledge to kill you.* He has advanced far into your camp and destroyed your entire army. He is challenging you to fight with him if you can. You probably thought that the whizz of his bow, was part of your yāga! The Devas, the sages, and those belonging to different worlds stand and wait to watch the prowess of Lakshmana. Why do you tarry? After all, your death is certain."

Indrajit was furious. He heaved a hot sigh. His golden shoulders adorned with garlands glowed. His breath hot, he laughed furiously and told Hanuman, "You have the audacity to come before me and utter these words. In a war, a dead person is considered dead for ever. Instead of this usual practice, you have got back your lives. You seem to have forgotten your earlier sufferings. You have asked me to seek my death and come for fight. *Have you kept the medicinal herbs ready for the resurrection, as you are all going to be killed by me?* Let Lakshmana or Rāma fight, and let their followers try to stop the war. The Devas and sages will soon see my valour when I slay the sea of monkeys and cause grief to those men. As long as I have my bow and fine shoulders, anyone with life coming to fight with me will only run away and try to escape. I will kill the hunchbacked monkeys and those two humans. If they are reborn

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as Devas, I will follow them to the celestial world and kill them there. Even the medicinal herbs cannot save you! Do not brag that you have won because my yāga has failed. I will not delay the fight any longer. These arrows of mine, which are capable of severing and scattering your heads individually will pierce through your bodies. I will not talk or boast with empty words, as you have done. You have given me victory twice. Defeated as you are, is it with the hope of achieving victory, at least now, that you are rushing before me? You did not learn to stand before me even once, when I fought with you furiously. This time will you all die and fall here or run away and escape?"

Repeatedly asking Hanuman to tarry, furious Indrajit wore a shining suit of armour, and hung his quiver on his shoulder. Wearing glittering gloves, radiant Indrajit held his bow and boarded a sturdy chariot. He twanged the bow and blew his conch. Hearing this, the celestial women wearing lustrous bangles beat their eyes with their hands. Lord Siva and Lord Brahma declared that a fierce battle was about to begin. The Devas observed that though as a reward for their penance, Indrajit's yāga did not materialise, there was little chance of the vānaras surviving. The moment the vānaras heard the twang of Indrajit's bow, they lost their courage, lost their self-control and dropped the trees and stones they held in their hands. They fell on the ground, rose and ran away, afraid of certain death. While the supreme commanders of the vānara army stood firm, the rest of them ran amuck like sea-water flowing aimlessly unable to bear the onslaught of the pralaya wind. Hanuman, standing near by, tore a huge mountain and held it in his hand. Indrajit who was a Yama unto Yama, told Hanuman, "Stop! I say stop! After talking so well, why should you take a stone? Is it because you hope to kill me on the battlefield in the presence of the Devas? Your action of course befits a monkey. Come on! Offer me a good fight!" Hanuman holding a mountain, stood facing Indrajit holding a bow. Seeing this, the Devas were concerned about Hanuman. His father Vāyu was also worried. With great speed, Hanuman hurled the mountain on the Rākshasās. Sparks of fire flashed in the sky in all directions frightening even thunder! But the mountain was reduced to powder by Indrajit's arrows. The world trembled. The Devas exclaimed that they had never seen Indrajit shooting such powerful arrows. They feared that before Hanuman could dig up another mountain and hurl it, Indrajit's shower of scorching, venomous arrows might pierce his body. Hanuman was near the peak of a mountain full of groves. Indrajit's shafts resembled the lustrous rays of the sun. Dripping with blood, Hanuman rose in anger looking like the rising sun. As he was feeling tired, Angada and other commanders of the vānara army, assembled with scorching fury. Ignoring

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all of them who had come to oppose him, Indrajit said, "Stop there! Where is that Lakshmana whom I had dispatched twice to the vast heaven?" On hearing these words, Angada and others became furious. They advanced towards Indrajit for a fight. But he told them angrily, "A lion will fight only an elephant and not a monkey. What is the use of shooting arrows at you? Will you not show me where that younger brother (Lakshmana) is? He can at least fight with me for some time. Do not die due to my anger. Did you not see Hanuman weakened by my arrow? Are you all mightier than Hanuman? Is my bow still not strong enough? Have my shoulders lost their strength? Why have you not left the battlefield yet? With what new strength have you come here? Show me those men, Rāma and Lakshmana, and return to your mountain."

The vānaras who saw Indrajit gearing himself to fight with Lakshmana, hurled rocks and trees at him and confronted him. Indrajit's shower of arrows which were capable of piercing the Meru mountain, attacked crores of vānaras, inflicting wounds on them and weakening them. Vibheeshana watched all this and told Lakshmana, "The victorious black cloud (Indrajit) is showering a rain of arrows, destroying your forces. The yāga undertaken by him has been ruined. Please act fast to ensure that he does not escape." Lakshmana proceeded towards Indrajit. The great Hanuman had by then regained his consciousness and vigour. With a pleasant face, he looked at Lakshmana and said, "Dear lord, please get onto my shoulders quickly." Lakshmana did so. Carrying him on his shoulders, Hanuman moved around the battlefield. Watching this, the Devas were relieved of their agony. Dark Indrajit, who looked like a thousand clouds joined together, made his appearance on a lofty chariot drawn by a thousand horses. He and Lakshmana directly clashed with each other. Hanuman grew in size and moved in all directions like Lord Tirumāl of a thousand names! *Lakshmana's arrows were like fire, thunder, predatory ghosts, hunger, disease and deadly sins!They moved as fast as the mind and fed flesh to vultures.* All these arrows were broken by the unsurpassed, mighty Indrajit who dispatched arrows like pralaya rains, destroying the sky, the eight regions, the lunar world and even the mountains and the seas. Indrajit's arrows resembled a thick host of sparrows and eliminated Lakshmana's arrows. Similarly, Indrajit's arrows were eliminated with identical arrows by Lakshmana. *The sturdy wheels of the chariot of destructive Indrajit and the strong legs of the furious Hanuman, went ahead unimpeded, demolishing and reducing to dust everything that came in their way including trees, strong rocks and grass.*

When Indrajit and Lakshmana were engaged in their fight, moving speedily and showering arrows, it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. They fought as

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fiercely as two tidal seas clashing with one another. The Devas who watched this, proclaimed that none in the world were comparable to these two. Their countless arrows transcended the speed of the mind and were invisible to the Devas. Even Vāyu could not find any gap between them. Except that Lakshmana and Indrajit were inflicting wounds on each other, nothing else could be made out. The twanging of their bows resembled thunderbolts and spread all over, destroying everything. Their arrows flew through the sky and fell like fierce thunder. The Devas saw the tips of the arrows clash with each other and emit sparks into the sky. The excessive heat of the arrows dried the water in the sea. Mountains were split. Trees were charred. Hot flames dried the blood of the foes. The odour of burning hair spread everywhere. Broken arrows filled the deep sea making its bed rise above the shore. *The earth revolved unsteadily.* The armies of both remained scattered in different regions owing to the sharp scorching arrows exchanged by them. The scattered monkeys lost their lives. The red blood from their bodies spread like the sea. Many were dead on both sides. *Of the arrows shot by Lakshmana, some flew in semicircles, some flew emitting smoke, some flew eliminating smoke and spitting fire, some flew leaving a burning trail, some flew to the left and some to the right, some flew separately, some flew in a bunch and clashed, and some others flew over the eight directions. Of the arrows shot by Indrajit some were like the flood, some were like fire, rocks, lofty clouds, thunder and the sea. While a few arrows resembled the chariot of the sun, others were like Lord Siva's heads and yet others were like the Meru mountain, the root of the world. The arrows shot by the two were like the exchange of looks by young women. They pierced their armoured chests, pierced their big handsome shoulders and pierced their thighs as well as their feet.*

Both Lakshmana and Indrajit bent the ends of their bows, which looked like two crescent moons. The Devas observed, "Never before has any Asura, Deva or anyone else, fought as fiercely as these two." In that war that day, the arrows of both flew fast, scorching the worlds, the sun and the moon. The Devas withered and wondered if they were facing the final deluge. The arrows shot by the two, drove the firmament to drop its stars, the sun to discharge its heat, the white moon to shed its 'deer', the sky to cast away its clouds, and all lives in all the worlds to give up their bodies. Indrajit who had vanquished all the regions, shot twenty-five sharp scorching arrows at Lakshmana. In reply, Lakshmana shot fierce arrows which pierced Indrajit's chest and loosened his armour which ultimately fell off. With arrows similar to the ones that had once driven away Irāvatam, Indrajit attacked mighty Hanuman's shoulders. *Blood*

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flowed profusely from the body of Hanuman, the embodiment of truth, and he looked like the sun rising in the east. Leonine Lakshmana who saw this, immediately showered a rain of arrows on Indrajit. These prevented him from moving anywhere, and finally pulverized his chariot. As the Devas and the Trinity of Gods rejoiced, Indrajit became angry and jumped into another chariot and shot ten arrows at Lakshmana's head, making it throb with pain. Getting over his pain, Lakshmana shot a few sharp, two-pronged arrows at Indrajit. Before he could remove them from his body, Lakshmana shot a unique arrow into his chest, like the kick* Lord Siva once gave the advancing Yama!

Indrajit lost his balance and was paralysed. The Devas raised a clamour. Lakshmana shot another arrow as hot as the midday sun, severing the flag on his chariot and piercing his shoulders. Blood flowed like a flame from Indrajit's body. Though destabilised like the shaken Meru, he regained his balance and shot nine hundred fierce and fiery arrows at Lakshmana. To his chagrin, they could not penetrate Lakshmana's impregnable armour and fell scattered. From a chariot drawn by a thousand horses, Indrajit again shot a thousand sharp and fierce arrows at Lakshmana's chest. Indrajit's arrows were struck down by one of Lakshmana's accurately aimed long arrows. In addition, he selected a few strong golden arrows and attacked Indrajit's body and also cut the string of his bow. *Indrajit wondered whether the bow in the hands of Lakshmana belonged to Lord Tirumāl or whether it belonged to Lord Siva.* Noticing that Lakshmana's arrows did not perish after shattering his armour and realising that he would not be able vanquish Lakshmana, he became depressed. Observing this, his uncle, Vibheeshana, told Lakshmana, "You have defeated lustful Rāvana's son, Indrajit, the conquerer of the Devas. I do not think this weak Indrajit will survive much longer." Resembling Yama, Indrajit suddenly twanged his bow and furiously shot the Vāyu-astram at Lakshmana, which was repulsed by an identical dart from the latter. The Agni-astram emitting fire, the Varuna-astram emitting water, the Soorya-astram emitting heat, all shot by Indrajit, were countered by Lakshmana with appropriate darts. Indrajit then challenged Lakshmana to stop his special dart, Isikam. Even this was countered by Lakshmana. Warning Lakshmana that he would be dead soon, Indrajit shot the ancient Brahmāstram of Lord Brahma. This was witnessed by Lord Siva, Lord Brahma, sages, ascetics, Devendra, and the others. Depressed as they were, they prayed that no harm should befall Lakshmana. The

** According to Indian mythology Lord Siva gave Yama a kick while he tried to snatch the life of Mārkandeya, a devotee of Lord Siva.*

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submarine fire emanating from the middle of the pralaya sea bore no comparison to the series of flames of the Brahmāstram which advanced towards Lakshmana. Indrajit thought that Lakshmana would not be able to stand before it, as on an earlier occasion. *Lakshmana, however, felt that hiding his valour was not right. He, too, decided to use the Brahmāstram on Indrajit.* After chanting hymns and praying to Lord Brahma to destroy only the dart released by Indrajit without taking away his life, Lakshmana dispatched his Brahmāstram. The Devas lauded Lakshmana for his grace. As directed by Lakshmana, his Brahmāstram neither destroyed the heaven and earth, nor hurt Indrajit's body. *Without retreating from the enemy, Lakshmana's Brahmāstram destroyed only the Brahmāstram released by Indrajit like a huge fire dissipating thunder.* The Devas were happy that Lakshmana had after all not given up dharma. With the object of preventing the spread of his Brahmāstram over the sky, Lakshmana shot another arrow spitting sparks of fire. *The new arrow shot by him reduced the strength of his own Brahmāstram like one poison neutralising another.* The Devas were relieved and exclaimed, "Can there be any virtue or greatness not applicable to the victorious Rāma and Lakshmana?"

The three-eyed Lord Siva told the celestials, "These feats are not difficult for Rāma and Lakshmana who are Nārāyana and Nara, the cause of all creation. They are the Supreme Lords of the celestials, transcending the boundaries of good and evil. They are beyond anyone's comprehension. They are ageless and excel even the four Védas. *To protect dharma and virtue, these two have taken the incarnation of humans subjecting themselves to the terrestrial discipline. They move about in the world, seen by all but understood by none.* This Lakshmana is divine in nature though he may not be considered a part of all lives. Rāma, who is omnipresent is the Supreme Lord who cannot be identified with clarity by any. These are the very ones who used to rest on the ocean of milk. *Because of your prayers, they have taken the incarnation of men to protect and establish dharma, by destroying the Rākshasās.*" The Devas said, "O destroyer of the sins of those who surrender to you! Though we were aware of what you said, we were caught in the divine deception. Freed from it, we have now understood who Rāma and Lakshmana are. With the illusion totally dispelled, we are free from suffering and are happy." The Devas then worshipped Lord Siva.

Indrajit, in the mean time, took Tirumāl's Nārāyanāstram in his hand and told Lakshmana, "If you can halt this dart, I concede that there is no one who can stand before you. But take care! This is an unerring weapon and you are certain to die." He

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then shot the Nārāyanāstram which shook all the worlds. As the dart was advancing towards Lakshmana, the Devas and the sages tried to protect themselves by raising their hands over their heads. Lakshmana saw the advancing Nārāyanāstram. He realised that the dart which was scorching the seven worlds was the imperishable Lord Tirumāl in the form of the Disc, and would not harm those who worshipped it. So he stood in its path with reverence. As soon as it came near him, the dart whirled around him and went away towards the sky without attacking him. The omnipresent fire got extinguished and the smoke disappeared. Looking at this the Devas, the crowd of vānaras and the celestial women danced ecstatically and the sages extolled Lakshmana as the universal protector. Lord Brahma and Lord Siva showered their praises. The futility of the Nārāyanāstram made Indrajit wonder who Lakshmana was and if he was Lord Tirumāl Himself. "Let him be anybody, I will shoot the Pāsupatāstram which is capable of demolishing all the worlds (created by the lofty Brahma) between dawn and dusk," declared Indrajit. The Devas were frightened and all the worlds were in great grief fearing that Indrajit would be destroying them at once. Indrajit said, "I suffered and did penance for a number of days and secured this weapon directly from Lord Siva with the assurance that it was unknown to anyone else. This will no doubt snatch the life of Lakshmana." Taking the Pāsupatāstram in his hand, Indrajit mentally offered flowers, water, sandalwood paste, fragrant smoke and dainty food, and worshipped the dart, hoping to squeeze the life out of Lakshmana. Pulling the string of his bow, Indrajit released the unerring Pāsupatāstram.

Spears, tridents, fiery arrows, hot flames, venom, serpents, thunderbolts, images of Yama, black demons and a crowd of huge fiends were seen everywhere. The big fire and whirlwind appearing during the final deluge, accompanied the Pāsupatāstram and caused havoc. On seeing the Pāsupatāstram, the Devas ran away frightened and the sages became sad. They feared that Lakshmana would certainly die, because the dart never failed. It would be superfluous to describe the plight of the vānaras. The sun, the moon and the three worlds moved without any direction. Seeing the advancing Pāsupatāstram, the great Vibheeshana was upset and began perspiring. He asked the hero of heroes, the virtuous Lakshmana, whether there was any way to escape from this weapon. Even the vānara warriors came and fell at the feet of the young lion, Lakshmana, who simply smiled and asked them not to fear. He raised his palm and said, "I do realise the fear caused by this weapon amongst the terrestrials and the celestials. Rest assured that I shall not be failing in my duty. I, too, will dispatch the Pāsupatāstram of Lord Siva!" Praying only for the destruction of the dart shot by Indrajit, and that everything else be spared, Lakshmana worshipped his

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Pāsupatāstram and released it from his bow. The dart immediately pursued and swallowed the dart of Indrajit. *Watching this spectacle, the denizens of heaven and earth raised a great clamour. The gem-set drums thundered. The sea and the clouds rumbled. The hearts of artistes thumped! The Védas and dharma bellowed. Everything else and the goddess of victory roared for joy.* To neutralise the effects of Indrajit's dart, the able Lakshmana had shot the Pāsupatāstram of Lord Siva who destroyed all the worlds during pralaya. Indrajit who excelled even Yama in the art of killing, was wonder-struck at the prowess of Lakshmana. *The mighty vānara warriors whose legs had become inactive, realised the greatness of Hari through Lakshmana.* Indrajit realised that it would be a slur on his valour if he let the destruction of his divine dart by Lakshmana's weapon dishearten him. Confident that his prowess to shoot arrows in succession was unfailing, Indrajit shot arrows at Lakshmana's shoulders and forehead. In the mean time, victorious commanders like Sugreeva, effortlessly plucked mountains and hurled them at the sea of Rākshasās. After shooting a billion sharp arrows at the vānara leaders and threatening their very survival, Indrajit saw his paternal uncle, Vibheeshana, standing beside Lakshmana and became furious.

Holding a big club, Indrajit told Vibheeshana, "You have departed from the virtuous path by moving with these humans, praising them sky-high, worshipping them like a slave, following them everywhere, and echoing their words like a drum. I shall kill you and make your head roll. I do not take that to be sinful. *Just as fishes will live only as long as there is water, the Rākshasās will live only as long as Rāvana lives*. If he were to die, these Rākshasās will also die. Only Lanka will exist, with you as the sole survivor and with none to stand by you when you become the king. In olden days, my father had vanquished Lord Tirumāl, the father of Brahma, in a battle. With a single hand, Rāvana had lifted Mount Kailas along with Lord Siva, the father of Lord Muruga. Was my father ruling this world with the help of these men, Rāma and Lakshmana? *The Devas would have worshipped you as the unique leader of the brahmins whose forefather is Lord Brahma.* But you have become a slave to these worthless men with whose support you hope to acquire the kingdom of your brother, Rāvana. Have you any sense of honour? Such honour would perish along with us. Rāma and Lakshmana had cut off the nose of your sister, talked ill of us, killed your brother, Kumbhakarna, and had lost to us in battle earlier. Making these men vanquish us may enable you to enjoy the wealth of our prosperous kingdom. Even abject poverty is far superior to wealth thus acquired! *O Vibheeshana, if Rāvana falls before Rāma's arrows and rolls on the dust-ridden ground, will you as his brother fall on his*

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body and weep or will you join the enemies and swim in a sea of happiness? Will you then applaud and worship Rāma who killed your brother? What have you dared to do? Are these men (who died and were restored to life with the help of medicinal herbs) capable of killing my father, the king of Lanka? Do you deserve to share the wealth of Rāvana? If I kill you with an arrow will you not reach heaven along with it?"

Vibheeshana nodded moving his flower-decorated tuft, and with a smile said, "Dear Indrajit, sin is treacherous. Dharma is always good. I do not wish to live with the help of wicked deeds which would drag us all into hell and cast a permanent slur on us. I want to be guided only by dharma and virtue. I will only give up falsehood, never truth. The moment Rāvana, the king of Lanka, committed the crime of abducting another's wife, I ceased to be his brother. I do not consume liquor. I do not snatch the possessions of others, nor do I think ill of others. I am flawless. You know me very well. Have you ever noticed any fault in me? Is it wrong to have severed my connection with one who harassed a chaste woman? When I advised your father that it was a crime to torture Seeta, the virtuous wife of the Supreme Lord who is universally worshipped, he furiously ordered me to go away. Hence I left. Will I go to hell? Never! All of you ignored dharma and stand ruined. Let 'name' and 'fame' adorn you, and 'heavenly bliss' be conferred on you! Let 'blame' and 'slur' befall us who follow dharma! Let hell be our lot! I surrendered to Lord Rāma only because I believe that virtue cannot be vanquished by vice. I am least concerned if my act is considered blameworthy, or if I perish without obtaining material enjoyment." Indrajit, looking as fierce as thunder, told Vibheeshana, "All the great things that you hope to achieve will be destroyed by a single arrow of mine." Selecting an arrow resembling the celestial bird Garuda, Indrajit shot it at Vibheeshana's neck. The arrow which was like thunder, fire and the spear of Lord Siva, advanced fast. The Devas exclaimed that Vibheeshana was certain to die. Lakshmana, however, destroyed the arrow. Indrajit, who was a Yama unto a Yama, immediately threw a spear at Vibheeshana. Lakshmana countered it with another arrow from his sturdy bow and reduced it to powder, making the seven worlds tremble with fear as though the sun had fallen down. Vibheeshana realised that Indrajit had attempted to kill him with the spear. He rose furiously and advanced towards him as fast as the wind. With the golden club in his hand, he killed Indrajit's charioteer and all the milky white horses drawing the chariot over which his flag flew. Standing on that damaged chariot, Indrajit shot a billion arrows, aimed at the shoulders of Vibheeshana and Lakshmana, and the chests of the surviving vānaras. When he saw all of them bleed profusely, he raised a loud clamour

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which shook the world. Realising, however, that he could be victorious only if he had an indestructible chariot, he disappeared into the sky before anyone could see him.

27. THE SLAYING OF INDRAJIT

The vānaras feared that Indrajit who disappeared into the sky would again resort to sorcery. Suspicion, concern and agony overtook them. In the mean time, with many thoughts engaging his mind and blood oozing from his wounds, Indrajit appeared before Rāvana. *On seeing him, Rāvana said, "The wounds on your shoulders tell me that the yāga started by you at Nikumbalai has not been completed. You tremble too much and your imperishable body shows signs of fatigue. You are like a serpent which lowers its hood when Garuda approaches it! Tell me what happened."* Indrajit, the vanquisher of all the worlds, replied "All my plans have been destroyed by your brother, Vibheeshana. Lakshmana surrounded Nikumbalai and spoiled the yāga. With all my might and fury, I shot darts. But they were rendered ineffective by Lakshmana. The dart dedicated to Lord Tirumāl, went respectfully round Lakshmana in the battlefield. Can there be a greater achievement for him than this? As a result of the cumulative sins of the Rākshasās, you have sought for yourself a terrible foe. If Lakshmana becomes furious, he will destroy the three worlds single-handed. In the close fight that took place earlier, Lakshmana did not use the Brahmāstram for fear that it would annihilate the world! That is how I returned victorious. This time, when I shot the same dart at him, he protected himself from it. He has vowed to kill me with his might which is extolled by the world. Giving up your lust for Seeta alone will rid Rāma and Lakshmana of their anger and make them go back, condoning the sufferings we inflicted on them. Please do not think that I am afraid of these men. I have spoken only because of my love for you."

Rāvana laughed, shaking his shoulders and showing his teeth which shone like the moon and told Indrajit, "You seem to stand perplexed, without any intention of going back to fight. You are afraid of those men. Dear Indrajit, I shall secure victory over these men this very day with my bow alone. *I did not undertake this war expecting either you or those who have lost their lives in the war earlier or those who have survived, to obtain victory for me. I sought this great enmity, depending entirely on my own might and valour.* My son, you have talked out of ignorance. Even when all the worlds are gone, my fame will remain. I will give up only this transient body which is like a bubble of water. As long as I have my twenty sturdy shoulders with me, I shall not give up Seeta. Even if I am not able to vanquish Rāma, will not my

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name last as long as the Védas exist in the world and the name of Rāma lives? Can death be avoided for ever? It is common to all. Those who are alive today, will die tomorrow, whereas there is no end to fame. The moment the Devas hear that I have given up Seeta, will they show me any respect? Instead, they will approach me and try to bind me. I am the conqueror of the ten regions. Will I easily die even if I am defeated by Rāma? Why should I tell you all this? You may go to your palace, remove the arrows stuck in your shoulders, be relieved of your sufferings and relax." Resembling a tiger with its mouth open, Rāvana ordered that his chariot be brought at once.

Seeing Rāvana rising to leave, Indrajit who was in the final stage of his life, prostrated himself at the feet of his father and said, "Please do not be angry. Bear with me for suggesting what should be done. I am going to the front. At least when you hear of my death there, please realise the truth of all that I have said." Indrajit then boarded a divine chariot, carrying with him the weapons surrendered by the celestials, as well as the knowledge of their use. He offered parting gifts to all those who sought them. *Shedding tears, he left for the battlefield, looking for a long time from the corner of his eye at his cruel father.* As soon as Indrajit boarded the chariot, the Rākshasās in Lanka stood up and surrounded him. They told him, "We will not leave you. We would rather die." He looked at them and said, "Protect the king. Do not be concerned. I will go at once and defeat those humans." The frightened Rākshasis approached him and raised a clamour. A few paid homage to him and also blessed him. Some looked at his face with their mouths dry. Some heaved a sigh. He finally left Lanka after 'vanquishing' the women who fought him with their long spear-like looks! Meanwhile, in the battlefield, Lakshmana looked at the sky and told Vibheeshana, "Evil Indrajit does not appear to be keen on fighting. He has avoided us and gone in another direction." Suddenly they heard the rumble of Indrajit's thousand-horse chariot. The golden chariot capable of moving in all three worlds, reduced the hills en route to dust. The rolling of Indrajit's gem-studded chariot destabilised the sea, made the sun and the moon run from their positions, ejected the bowels of the opposing monkeys, shook the mountains, tore the earth along with its deep pits (which in turn were filled by the dust that arose from the moving chariot), and crushed the hood of the serpent known as nocturnal darkness! The Rākshasa armies raised a wild clamour which startled the Devas and the horde of monkeys. While Indrajit, a professional warrior, showered arrows from his bow, the virtuous Lakshmana stood before him, raised a deafening sound and fought fiercely. Fire with dense smoke broke out all over the world.

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Vibheeshana told Lakshmana, "If you allow Indrajit to escape from the front, you will not be able to adorn yourself with the garland of victory." Immediately, graceful Lakshmana, shot a series of sturdy and thunderous arrows, which disturbed all the worlds, brought down the mountains and frightened even Ādisesha who bore the earth! Indrajit shot back arrows, which had a thousand pointed tips in them! Lakshmana did likewise. Harsher than the pralaya fire, these arrows snatched the lives of warriors on both sides. The deadly arrows shot by the fiery-eyed Indrajit were made ineffective by Lakshmana's arrows. At the same time, the arrows shot by leonine Lakshmana pierced Indrajit's body and stayed there drawing his blood. While the long arrows shot by Indrajit entered the armour of the bright Lakshmana without harming or touching him, they entered Hanuman's body as easily as snakes entering snake-holes. Hanuman, however, ignored them. Lakshmana immediately shot sharp arrows to destroy the venomous Indrajit's armour, making holes in his body. The arrows of Indrajit (whose eyes gave out fire) could not strike their targets accurately. They stopped midway. Seeing this, the Devas became jubilant. Giving up the bow, Indrajit hurled a fire-emitting spear given to him by Pulastya commanding it to proceed fast. Lakshmana saw the spear which was brighter than the sun, coming towards him. *He shot a scorching arrow, more powerful than the curses of the seven great sages and broke the spear in two.* Lakshmana, the prince, shot a thousand arrows which pierced Indrajit's body, causing his blood to flow on the earth. When Indrajit, whose body had become dry, attempted to pull out arrows from his quiver, Lakshmana showered deadly arrows which tore away the quiver. Knowing that as long as Indrajit's chariot was firm and stable he would not lose his strength, Lakshmana shot a fatal arrow, which plucked the mountainous head of the charioteer and knocked him down on the ground. *The beautiful, sturdy, golden chariot resembled the mind of a student in grief after the death of his preceptor who had guided him in controlling his five senses and leading an ascetic life.*

Indrajit himself drove the chariot and used his big chest as a quiver! Frightening everyone, he plucked the arrows embedded in his chest and hurled them one by one. These arrows pierced the noble Lakshmana, Hanuman and the shoulders of others. Triumphantly, Indrajit raised a wild clamour. The Devas showered divine karpaga flowers on him declaring him a hero among heroes who displayed courage even though on the verge of death. Recognising the great prowess of Indrajit, Lakshmana, too, praised him and said, "Indrajit has plucked all the mighty arrows from his body and has shot them back at me ! He appears fearless, without any tremor in his hands,

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without allowing his mind and body to be disturbed, without being confused, despite the fact that crores of arrows are embedded in his body. Manly prowess and heroism will die along with great Indrajit." Vibheeshana told Lakshmana, "Indrajit may drive his chariot away into the sky before we know it. He may give up his fight and resort to sorcery. He may go behind the clouds and play his tricks. You will see all this shortly. The truth is, Indrajit can never be killed in the dark. He can be killed only in the daytime." Lakshmana replied, "Except killing Indrajit today, is there anything else to be done? Wherever Indrajit goes, my mighty arrows will follow him. You will see that we will attain victory instantly."

Resembling the red blood flowing from the body of Indrajit, the sun was moving upwards from the red eastern horizon. With each ray resembling an arrow, the sun was hot with thousands of rays around him. Looking like the cruel Indrajit jumping into the sky, the sun traversed in his golden chariot. With the appearance of the hot sun in the world, the Devas observed, "The sun, like a bright lamp, has arrived to remove the darkness known as Rākshasās. The deceptive acts and the might of the Rākshasās will wane and they will be destroyed." Vibheeshana, who could foresee the future, told Lakshmana, "As long as Indrajit holds his bow in his hand and possesses the divine chariot presented to him by Lord Siva, he will not die in war." Realising that neither would the horses drawing Indrajit's chariot die, nor would the wheels of the chariot break easily, Lakshmana loosened the chariot's axle-pin with an arrow. This separated the axle and the wheels, and the long, gem-set chariot overturned. The mighty horses drawing the chariot became ineffective like the birds on the branch of a tree felled by a sharp axe. Indrajit hurled all the weapons lying in the damaged chariot at Lakshmana. These weapons were destroyed in no time by Lakshmana's arrows. Indrajit reached the sky and raised a wild clamour, as if he was tearing the three worlds. While none could see where he was, everyone heard the loud noise he made. The strong and dark-shouldered Indrajit, through the boons he had secured, showered a rain of stones on the vānaras who ran amuck unaware of the direction in which they were moving. With their bodies injured, they fell on the ground. Lakshmana saw only the rain of stones and nothing else. He realised that Indrajit was hiding in the sky. Lakshmana immediately shot a stream of deadly arrows, which screened the sky and the eight regions like Lord Trivikrama who had measured all the worlds. Indrajit now found it very difficult to fight unseen. Lakshmana noticed Indrajit's figure resembling a cloud dripping with blood amidst the cluster of dark clouds. He thought, "Even if his bow does not fall down, Indrajit cannot prevent his sturdy

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mountain-like shoulders from being severed." *Lakshmana then bent his strong bow and shot an arrow in the shape of a crescent moon and severed Indrajit's arm adorned with gem-set ornaments. The arm as well as Indrajit's bow fell.*

At the end of a yuga when all living beings in the world perish, a wild wind dashes against the clouds which fall to the ground along with the rainbow. Similarly, the sharp-tipped fierce arrow looking like the crescent moon, attacked Indrajit, causing his big broad arm to be severed, with bright light flashing from the gem-set ornaments covering it. As if the hoods of Ādisesha were biting the half moon in the sky, Indrajit's severed arm, with the fingers firmly holding the bow throbbed, crushing and powdering the trees and stones, and killing the monkeys. The Devas witnessing the war from the sky observed, *"If the handsome arm of even Indrajit can be severed, what is the purpose of anyone wanting to lead a mechanical life?"* The Rākshasās felt as if they had lost their own heads. When all this was happening, a horde of monkeys rose with a roar and prevented the army of Rākshasās from going back to the city. The monkeys, with their slaying fingers, teeth, and big rocks, killed the Rākshasās and created new places for them in heaven. The dark-complexioned Indrajit threatened to hurl Lord Siva's trident at Lakshmana and vowed, "I will not die till I kill you, though you have never faced defeat in battle." Like the pralaya wind, like a thunderbolt, like the submarine fire, Indrajit appeared in the sky in the form of Yama, and proceeded towards Lakshmana with the trident. Seeing Indrajit in the sky, Lakshmana decided that the time had come to sever his head.

Lakshmana declared, "If it is true that Rāma is the virtuous Lord discerned only by the scriptures and is the ultimate divinity worshipped by the learned who have mastered the Védas, then let Indrajit be killed with this arrow." Lakshmana with all his might, pulled the string of his bow and shot a crescent-like arrow at Indrajit. Thereby, Lakshmana not only saved the world from the Rākshasās, but also secured for himself lasting fame in the world. *Lakshmana's divine arrow humbling the Cakra of Lord Tirumāl, the Vajrāyudham of Devendra, the Trident of Lord Siva and the Brahmāstram of Lord Brahma, sped towards Indrajit and severed his head!*. Even before the severed head could fall to the earth, Indrajit's arrow-studded body, along with the trident held in his right hand, fell down on the ground, like a cloud (attacked by a pralaya hurricane) falling down with thunder and lightning. Indrajit's head with his curly red hair resembling fire, and his glowing two ear-rings fell on the earth, like the hot sun falling with two crescent moons! As soon as life goes out of the body, the inner

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feelings, mind, knowledge and even the flawless five senses no longer exist. Similarly, the moment Indrajit died, the rest of the sharp-toothed Rākshasās lost their prowess, became inactive, cast away their weapons and ran towards Lanka. With Indrajit the greatest of all talented archers dead, the Devas rejoiced that Rāvana's reign would no longer continue. They threw away their clothes, appearing like gods without robes! Lord Tirumāl, Lord Siva and Devendra came down to the earth, revealed their presence and caused the vānaras to regain their lives, proving the words of the knowledgeable that for those who lead virtuous lives there is never any peril or end.

Angada, the son of Vāli, marched forward holding Indrajit's severed head in his hand, and jumped and danced ecstatically. Lakshmana stood on a mound and the Devas showered flowers on him. He then sat on Hanuman's shoulders and following Angada, proceeded towards Rāma. Watching this, Devendra's shoulders swelled with pride. He felt absolved of the slur of having been vanquished by Indrajit in an encounter. *Holding his head high with a face shining like the full moon, pushing his age-old grief away and feeling exhilarated, he said, "Like the blemish in the moon, the scar of the wound created in me could never disappear as long as Indrajit who had conquered me was not vanquished. An archer, Lakshmana, appeared on the scene, removed that scar, and relieved me of my humiliation.* Can there be any greater wealth that I can obtain? Do I need anything hereafter? Will I ever feel small hereafter? The severed head of Indrajit who had vanquished me and caused immense suffering to me, is being carried in the hand of the pleasant young Angada, the recipient of the grace of Lord Rāma. Watching this, while the Rākshasās hang their heads down, I hold my head high. I shall shortly snatch their royal umbrella, too."

Rāma was deeply concerned when Lakshmana had gone to fight with Indrajit. He was depending only on dharma to assist him. Consoling himself with the fond hope that Lakshmana would return after decisively defeating the deceitful Indrajit, Rāma looked like austere Bharata holding on to his life and waiting for the return of his brother (Rāma). On seeing the victorious Lakshmana, profuse tears flowed from his lotus eyes. *No one can say whether these tears were the result of his love, or sorrow, or due to his rejoicing, or due to the compassion flowing from the melting of his bones!* Shedding tears of joy, a jubilant Rāma came forward to meet Lakshmana who placed Indrajit's head, with its flame-like tuft and its teeth pressing the lip of its open mouth, at the feet of his brother. With great pleasure, Rāma looked at Indrajit's head, looked at Lakshmana's mountainous golden shoulders where the goddess of valour rested,

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then looked at the might and physique of Hanuman and the bow held by Lakshmana. *He was happy, but silently so. There was nothing that he possessed for himself except Lakshmana. Like the black cloud embracing the crimson sky, and like the morning sun spreading over a black mountain, he embraced his brother who fell at his feet revealing the blood-red wounds over his chest and shoulders.* Rāma removed Lakshmana's quiver and loosened the belt fastening the armour covering his chest. Taking off the armour, he embraced Lakshmana several times with his golden arms, thereby healing the wounds and scars caused by the sharp pointed arrows. *He then looked at him and said, "O great man, this victory has not been achieved either by you or the mighty Hanuman or through the boons given by a Deva. This victory, in truth, has been granted to us by Vibheeshana!"*

28. RĀVANA'S GRIEF

Rāvana's messengers returned from the front and ran towards Lanka, crossing the battlefield (full of the roar of the wailing sound) and the river of blood. They entered the city gate to tell Rāvana what had happened. Rākshasis resembling black nightingales assembled before their palaces and sobbed aloud. Listening to this sound, the messengers said to themselves that Lanka had perished that day. Going to Rāvana with a depressed mind, the frightened messengers told him, "Your son Indrajit has ceased to live from today." The slim-waisted celestial dancers who were near Rāvana, were terror-stricken thinking of what Rāvana would do after hearing this. They ran helter-skelter in all directions, and disappeared from the sight of the king of Lanka. Rāvana's eyes emitted smoke and red fire. He drew his sword from its sheath. *With his hands (looking like waves) which had become weak, Rāvana flung the sword at the necks of the messengers, and fell on the floor.* It appeared as if the pralaya fire, fanned by the wind, was born that day in Rāvana. The hooded serpent, Ādisesha, suffered acutely due to the destabilisation of the earth when Rāvana fell down from his seat. Rāvana's fiery rage, his growing love for his son and his agony, made his twenty eyes shed a river of tears which appeared like molten copper. He gnashed the teeth in his ten mouths producing lightning and thunder like the rainy season. He struck the floor all around with his palms causing pits from which sea water sprang!

Rāvana's agony was like that of one whose burning wound is pierced by a spear. He prattled and called aloud for his son using several affectionate terms like, "My son! My proud son! My father! My life!" and wailed loudly saying, "Even though you are

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dead, I continue to live!" Moaning in distress, Rāvana asked, "Will not the Devas who suffered before, raise a jubilant clamour now? Has Devendra's enmity ceased to exist? As if talking to his son, Rāvana would say, "Lord Siva and Lord Tirumāl were hiding till now in Mount Kailas and the ocean of milk. Now that you are dead they will freely go about everywhere on their respective mounts, Nandi and Garuda! The Devas and their celestial chariots, too, will move about freely because of the victory achieved by these men." He wailed sadly calling out the name of his son and then slipped into anger. He stood up and after some time sat on the floor. He prattled and became exhausted. He perspired. He took a few steps and fell down. He opened his eyes and gazed, and then closed them again. He ploughed the ground with his body and rolled on it in great agony.

Out of Rāvana's ten heads, one head cried, "O lord!" Another cried, "How can I rule after I have lost you?" One head said, "Having exposed you to danger, how can I, a despicable fellow, continue to live?" Yet another head said, "How sad it is that you have not embraced me with your lovely pillar-like arms!" The fifth head wailed, "Dear Indrajit! You are a mighty archer! How did a deer consume the life of a tiger?" "Lord Siva and Lord Tirumāl had hurled darts at you in earlier wars. You defeated them with your arrows. Why did you not demonstrate your prowess to Lakshmana now?" the sixth head asked. The seventh head asked, "Are you really dead? How can I be separated from you who are my able supporter? Is it a prank? Will you not come back to life? I am greatly depressed by your separation from me. I am alone. I am afraid without you by my side." The eighth head said, "You snatched the crown of Devendra and wore the garland of victory. Should I now see that garland on the battleground where crows have assembled?" The ninth head asked, "Will the sharp-eyed wives of our foes, who used to tremble in utter fear and touch their māngalyams on hearing the twang of your bow, be relieved of their fear hereafter?" *The tenth head of Rāvana said, "O hero of boundless might, I know Yama, too, is not strong enough to come before you to take away your life. Which world have you reached without my knowledge?"*

Full of grief, Rāvana addressed his son in various ways. With the object of finding the body of his beloved son, he got up from his seat, moved fast and entered the battlefield. All in the three worlds including the Devas, wondered what would happen next. They followed Rāvana with great concern. Some of the fiends and birds saw Rāvana in the battlefield and wept. Some prostrated themselves at his feet as if they loved him. Some pretended to sleep, while some hid themselves inside the bodies of

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elephants which had died in the battle. Rāvana searched the battlefield the whole day for the body of his son. He overturned crores of dead horses, corpses of Rākshasās, dead elephants, and chariots. With his heart burning like fire fed with ghee and tears rolling down his deceitful eyes, Rāvana finally saw Indrajit's mighty arm holding the bow, his quiver full of arrows, and the shining arrows stuck in his bulky severed shoulders. He took the arm which looked like a fierce-eyed cobra and kept it on his head. Heaving a deep sigh similar to the one heard during one's last days, he placed the arm over his rock-like chest and embraced it. He rolled it on his neck and then kept it back on his head. Smelling it, he pressed it on his rolling eyes and melted in grief. After finding the arm, he saw Indrajit's body resembling the black sea. Like a river falling into a sea full of waves, his tears fell in a stream on the body. *A rain of arrows covered Indrajit's chest. Rāvana clasped it to his bosom drenched with a rain of tears.*

Could anyone in this world have suffered the acute agony Rāvana suffered then? He plucked the arrows from Indrajit's chest, broke all of them, and swooned. He vowed furiously that he would put the sun and the seven worlds into his mouth and chew them. The Devas and sages went into hiding fearing that Rāvana in his fury might end up confronting the Trinity of Gods and the three worlds! Rāvana was unable to find Indrajit's head anywhere in the battlefield. In anguish, he cried, "That man Lakshmana has taken away my son's head!" Heart-broken Rāvana wept aloud, tearing the sky, and asked, "Am I fit only to displace Mount Kailas and the mighty elephants that guard the eight directions? What a shame it is that I still carry the burden of my life, helplessly watching these men who snatched the head and the life of my flawless son! After destroying beautiful cities like Amarāvati, I owned the three worlds. But today I see jackals eating the body of my son who has lost his flower-bedecked head. Even the food left over by a dog is superior to the food eaten by me. To destroy one enemy, (Lakshmana), all those who accompanied my son have fallen dead. Those two ascetics, Rāma and Lakshmana, and the monkeys including Hanuman are not yet dead. Can there be anything better than this to demonstrate the 'brave life' of this Rāvana? Dear son, the sweet-voiced daughters of Gandharvas, Yakshas, Siddhas and Asuras, more beautiful even than Goddess Lakshmi, were your wives. If they approach me and weep, asking me to show them their husband, should I only lament with them unable to give an answer? What is the use of my defeating Yama or Devendra? Now, because of an ornamental beauty known as Seeta, instead of your performing the last rites for me as my son, I have to do the same for you with great grief. Is there anyone worse than me in this world?"

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Rāvana went on wailing. He called out his son's name. He was depressed and in agony. With great love he carried the body of his son and entered the golden city of Lanka. The Rākshasis wept aloud and swooned. The sound of weeping and wailing reached the ten directions. Countless was the number of women, who were mentally afflicted on seeing the corpse of Indrajit. A number of women dug out their eyes, severed their heads, tore their bosoms, removed their livers and pulled out their tongues. *The citizens of Lanka who silently watched Rāvana carrying the crownless and headless trunk of Indrajit, who had mighty shoulders transcending the regions, shed tears resembling the shimmering water of the sea.* Their copious tears, affectionately shed for Indrajit, joined the dark sea. Rākshasis who loved him more than they loved their own lives, held their hands over their heads, wept and rolled on the ground. Accompanied by them, Rāvana with his eyes ejecting blood, entered the royal palace.

Beating her breasts and letting loose her thick locks of black hair which touched her feet, Indrajit's slim-waisted mother, Mandōdhari the wife of Rāvana, came and saw the body of her son. Walking on the ground as if she was stepping on fire, she fell with great grief on the body of her unique son, like a peacock (shot by the sharp arrow of a hunter) falling on a rock. Mandōdhari did not breathe. She became unconscious. Her body did not move, making one wonder whether she was alive at all. Later, she sobbed without talking. She did not sweat. Nor did she forget anything. Remaining thus for some time, she slowly recovered. In great agony, Mandōdhari opened her mouth, lamented aloud and said, "During your childhood, you grew like the waxing moon. You vanquished Devendra with your masterly archery. To see all this with my eyes, I had done penance. But to see your headless trunk now, what penance have I done? After seeing you dead, and having lost my faculty of thinking, will I ever again think of the ephemeral worldly life? O nectar-like handsome darling! O mighty Yama-like hero excelling the prowess of Lord Tirumāl and Lord Siva! O unique vanquisher of the three worlds! How can I live without seeing your lotus face? When you were a crawling infant with anklets adorning your legs, you had caught two lions. You used to infuriate them, fight with them and play with them in the courtyard. Will I ever see those pranks again? Like a big elephant amongst us, you had once beckoned the white moon, lifted him in your two palms, caught hold of the blemish in him and exclaimed that it was a hare. I am eager to see you repeating that feat. Will you not rise and do it now? Have the Rākshasis and Vidyādhara women with moon-like faces embraced and enticed you, making you sleep deeply on the bed, or is this sleep caused

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only by exhaustion during your fight? Should my son who vanquished the three worlds and the Trinity of Gods be killed by one of these men? Can the Meru be shattered by a small particle? The sea of Rākshasās has been destroyed by these two furious men like a bundle of cotton burnt by fire.. *Will not the king of Lanka also die tomorrow like this, because of the poison mixed with nectar known as Seeta? I shudder to think of such an event."*

Rāvana who heard the wailing of Mandōdhari, became furious. All this sorrow was caused by Seeta. "I shall slay that stone-hearted, vengeful Seeta with my sword," he swore, and ran out. Seeing Rāvana rushing out, Mahōdaran knew that he would bring a slur on himself. With a determined mind, he approached Rāvana, fell at his feet with profound respect and said, "Dear king, if, out of anger, you kill without any compunction an ascetic woman hailing from a noble dynasty, the Trinity of Gods will laugh at you. You will sully your name forever. You had once hurled your sword which severed the heads of mighty foes and cut the tusks of the elephants protecting the eight regions. If you use the same victorious, shining sword to kill beautiful Seeta, that sword itself will feel ashamed of the duty assigned to it and lose its power before it can take away her life. To kill a woman is an act of injustice, for those belonging to this or the celestial world. It is against dharma and also not a practice followed in Lanka. You are a scion of the great Pulastya dynasty. Why should you incur everlasting blame by committing this murder which is not an act of valour? Will you kill Seeta today with your sword, achieve victory over Rāma, return to Lanka and again lament over the death of Seeta? Or is it because you hope that in the event of Seeta's death, those two men would desert the war and return home? Is this a heroic way of achieveing your goal? Please tell me." After listening to Mahōdaran, Rāvana threw away the sharp sword he had taken to kill Seeta. He took a solemn pledge not to return to the city of Lanka till he had severed the heads of his foes and also recovered the head of his son Indrajit who was killed by their might. Rāvana then directed that the body of his son be preserved in a trough of oil in accordance with the ancient custom.

29. SURVEYING THE ARMY

After the servants laid Indrajit's body in oil, Rāvana ordered messengers to bring all the army divisions, stationed in various regions, to Lanka. Accomplishing the task, the messengers reported to Rāvana that there was not enough space in Lanka for the new army, and sought further directions from him. Rāvana rose happily and asked,

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"Where is the army stationed?" With folded hands, they replied, "Everywhere. The vast army, which is like the raging seven seas rising simultaneously during pralaya, has no more space on the earth." Countless armies of Rākshasās reached the city, like the seven clouds rising at the end of the universe. In that army assembled in Lanka on that day, even lightning could not have shed as much lustre as the flashing swords. The sound of thunder could not have made as much din as the drumbeats. Even the clouds were less dark than that army of Rākshasās. The countless warriors in the army rose further and further, surrounded several places in the worlds, and arrived battalion after battalion. The full moon and the stars rose above their positions out of fright. The sun deviated from his orbit and stood high in the sky!

Shining like the Meru, the army marching towards Lanka through its four open gateways, looked like a big black sea that Yama was diverting to another place, because the earth would not be able to bear its weight. Fearing that the gateways were inadequate for their entry, the warriors (looking as if all the clouds from all over the world had assembled) climbed over the walls of the fort and reached Rāvana's city of Lanka. *Standing on his great tower, Rāvana wished to see the entire army at a stretch, like a fool aspiring to see all the seven seas together at a glance. Such was the size of the army which moved fast, like the water of the sea, from one direction to another*! The messengers inspired Rāvana by describing the army, division by division, as if explaining a scriptural text in detail! The messengers said, "Those warriors there are from the Sāga island. Created as a reward for the yāgas performed by the Rākshasās, they destroyed the Devas by inducing them to commit lustful deeds. They are experts in sorcery and their bodies touch the clouds." Pointing to another division, the messengers told Rāvana, "O great victor! Those warriors are from the Kusai island. The Devas lost their fame, wealth and abode only because of them." Showing another set of warriors, the messengers said, "Those hail from the Sānmali island. They fought fiercely with Devendra and destroyed the golden Amarāvati. They hold their heads high, having received boons from Lord Siva. Their fury is as inflammable as a fire in a dry forest." Pointing to another group, the messengers told Rāvana, "Those warriors are the inhabitants of the Krounca island. In days gone by they tried to throw the Meru into the roaring sea and stopped only after the Devas begged them not to do so!

"Those Rākshasās there reside in the coral mountain. Born to blue-eyed Rākshasis, they are ten crore in number. In a matter of days they drank the entire ocean of milk

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dry! O king, those Rākshasās there with sword-like teeth are from a unique mountain known as Gandhamādanam, which is beyond the black sea. They are as venomous as the deadly Hālāhala poison. We are unaware of their number! Look at those warriors there. They hailed originally from the 'big hills'. At present they live on an island in the midst of the sea, only because of Lord Brahma's plea! The heroes yonder, holding bows and deadly spears with three leaves, are the lords of the seven seas, the home of crocodiles. At present they are the residents of the island known as Pushkara. Those warriors there reside in the big island known as Erali. In olden days, at the instance of their proud mother, they imprisoned Yama in the Cakravala mountain. They released him only after Lord Brahma begged them to do so! The warriors whom you see over there, possess the hands of a fiend! On the advice of Lord Brahma, they live in the seven types of abysses in the nether world. Still, they have chosen to come here and assist you because of their love for you! Those warriors there belong to the clan of Nirudi. In securing boons and in valour, they are like your clan. They are so ferocious that if they do not get enough blood to drink, they will consume the water of the seven seas! The warriors whom you see there were presented with golden anklets meant for heroes. The garlands of victory they wear are tokens of their victory over Devendra! These mountainous wild-eyed and furious warriors live in an abyss. Ādisesha could not sleep, because of them!

"The warriors whom you see there, holding lustrous swords, possessing sharp teeth and marching in large numbers, were born out of the fire that rose from the great rage of Goddess Kāli when Lord Siva danced the Oordhwatāndavam for her. They are like the brothers of fiends! Those warriors there are great archers, coming from the northern region. *They are as old as sins. They possess dreadful eyes which resemble brightly lit caves. When angry, they are so cruel and wicked that they eat their own mothers!* The heroes whom you see yonder, hail from Lord Siva's third eye which can burn all the worlds to ashes. They are born Yamas with the ability to demolish the might of their foes. Those warriors holding tridents were born out of the blood that flowed freely from the bosom of Yama when his chest was touched by the divine feet of Lord Siva. They were created even before the Hālāhala poison or the nectar of immortality, and are experts in war! Those Rākshasās came from the submarine fire fed with the fierce venom of the serpent Vāsuki! It is impossible to conceive or describe in detail these several warriors, as they are countless in number. If we start narrating their deceptive acts, the boons they have received, or the penances they have done, it will take more than a thousand ages. Just one warrior from this huge army can

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destroy those powerful monkeys, and the mighty Rāma and Lakshmana single-handed. What else is there to say?"

Rāvana said to the messengers, "Tell me what the size of the army is, and their number." The messengers replied, "Those who say that the army consists of one thousand vellams, can only be called mad because the highest numerical expression available now is too small for ennumerating the strength of this army!" Rāvana then directed the messengers to bring before him the numerous commanders of the various armies so that he could acquaint himself with them, narrate all that had happened, speak some pleasant words, move happily with them and offer them befitting compliments. The messengers duly conveyed Rāvana's wishes. All the commanders of the sea-like army came from different regions and showered flowers on Rāvana's handsome feet. The deafening din made by their clashing crowns as they paid homage to him, reached the sky. The heroic Rāvana looked at the commanders and said, "You have all come here seeking my welfare. I welcome you heartily. I do hope your wives and children are all well." Wanting to know Rāvana's mind, the army commanders told him, "You, our supreme leader, have huge, strong shoulders. The boons secured by us through our penances are many. Will it therefore be difficult to accomplish our task? We have vanquished the Devas. We have no other enemies. Has any difficult task been assigned to us? Please tell us why your women and children appear concerned and you look sad." Rāvana explained all that had happened as a consequence of his desiring Seeta. The army commanders told Rāvana, "If those who vanquished Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and the furious clan of Rākshasās with arrows, are mere men and if our army has been defeated by the monkey army, our prowess is wonderful indeed!" The commanders then laughed derisively. They added, "You have invited us here, neither for removing the world from the head of Ādisesha, nor for tearing up from their very roots the seven mighty mountains, nor for siphoning off the entire sea full of waves, from the palms of our hands, but merely to fight with monkeys eating flowers and leaves!" The commanders, then laughed sarcastically and clapped their hands. Vanni, the Rākshasa king of the Pushkara island, through a sign of his head asked the commanders possessing shining teeth, to go away. *He asked Rāvana, "Who are these men? What is their might?"*

Māliyavān intervened and said, "I will tell you about all that has happened so far, the prowess of these men and the greatness of the victorious vānara commanders who accompany them. Please listen. By the very touch of Rāma's bow, the mighty-shouldered Virādha and Mārica lost their lives. Trisiran as well as Khara and

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Dooshana who resembled big black mountains, were destroyed along with their vast army, in a trice. All of you, who are spread here like an ocean, perhaps know of Vāli who used to cross all the seas with the speed of the pralaya wind. An arrow shot by Rāma slew this Vāli, who had the strength to lift the seven mighty mountains. Why should you ask us to tell you about the prowess of Rāma and Lakshmana? Are you not aware that the sea boiled when it was attacked by Rāma's Agni-astram? Did you not hear the loud crash long ago, when Rāma broke the sturdy bow of Lord Siva? Attacked by Rāma and Lakshmana, the fierce and mighty Rākshasa army of over a thousand vellams was made to fill the kingdom of Yama. Kumbhakarna, Atikāyan, Pragattan and the rest of the warriors along with Indrajit, are dead. Only Rāvana and I remain alive today. Because the core army (Moolabala padai) consisting of three hundred divisions of sturdy warriors, indicated to us that this was the right time for them to enter the war, you have been brought here. Now listen to the capabilities of the vānara army assisting the impeccable Rāma and Lakshmana. A monkey, an envoy, came here, set fire to Lanka and made the Rākshasis cry. The monkey killed the furious Akshakumāran by scraping him on the ground in a battle, destroyed the vast Rākshasa army and leapt across the big sea. Have you not seen the Sétu built by these monkeys? They did it by filling the sea with mountains. They are seventy vellam strong. One among them jumped to the other side of the Meru and returned in a trice with the mountain containing herbs. This war, brought about by destiny, is over a virtuous and chaste woman full of penance, known as Seeta. It is immaterial whether those archers (Rāma and Lakshmana) or you, win! Take my words as the words of a ripe old person."

Vānni looked at Rāvana and asked him, "When all these persons have lost their lives, why did you not participate in the war?" Rāvana replied, "I did not fight because I felt ashamed to fight with those despicable monkeys." Vanni said, "In that case it would be our duty to fight. The words spoken by this elderly Māliyavān, who is aware of all that has happened, hint at the need for reconciliation with Rāma and Lakshmana, by setting Seeta free. This should have been done in the beginning. Now it is too late. It will also be humiliating, especially when they have killed affectionate Indrajit. Even if Seeta is released, it will not bring back the innumerable warriors who gave up their lives willingly in the war. Such a step will only bring us blame. Now there is no scope for peace. We must annihilate our enemies completely. Our duty at present is to proceed with the war." Vanni got up after uttering these words. The other Rākshasās who were with Vanni, told Rāvana, "Please stay here. We will go and squeeze the blood out of the small bodies of those men and return victorious. If, they

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shamelessly turn and flee, they can only be considered to be born in a weak and mean clan!" The Rākshasās then left the place.

30. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CORE ARMY

Rāvana, who had slain even enemies of great prowess, told the newly-assembled army commanders, "I will proceed in one direction, cut the bodies of the monkeys in the army and consume their lives. All of you can go and kill the two men." The army commanders rose, boarded their chariots and joined their respective armies which were as huge as the roaring sea. After directing the core army (Moolabala padai) to leave earlier, Rāvana got into a chariot and proceeded towards Rāma's army. *Just as all the oceans, mountains and beings of the world are contained in the dwarf-like Vāmana, all types of armed forces were contained within that army known as Moolabala padai. This army was so fierce that it consumed dharma as 'food', drank mercy as 'water', wore atrocities against virtues as 'ornaments' and acquired sins as 'wives'.* The Rākshasās in this Moolabala padai had the complexion of clouds, were like fire unto fire, and possessed red hair as if their rage had boiled and spread upwards! Even Yama complimented them! These warriors with their long arms pushed the water in the sea aside, and swallowed the fishes and snakes. They wandered about wearing lightning as their ear-rings and clouds as their apparel. These heroes had a cluster of mountains strung on big serpents as their anklets! They flew fast like the mighty Garuda. If ever these warriors failed to get meat, they pounced upon big elephants and swallowed them to appease their hunger. If they did not get cool sweet water to drink when thirsty, they grabbed the clouds in the sky, squeezed them and drank. To test the sharpness of their spears they drove them into mountains, and for their training, they swung their clubs over them. Roaring like thunder, they resembled Yama, the Trinity of Gods and Lord Muruga, whether they wielded the lustrous trident, sword, bow, club, vél or disc.

A single warrior from the Moolabala Padai was enough to vanquish the world, while two of them could defeat the seven worlds! *The strength of this Moolabala padai was such that they had elephants as many in number as the clouds spread out around the world. The chariots with jingling bells were as many as the elephants. The horses were as many as the worldly pleasures, and the soldiers were as many as the beings created!* The bodies of these elephants, chariots and horses, were adorned only with gold and gems.

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This huge Moolabala padai marched forward, raising a clamour. Red dust rose high and screened the sky. Dark clouds which never failed to shower rains, turned red because of the dust. The huge roaring salty sea turned sweet with the saliva of rutting elephants. The gateways of Lanka, which provided exits to the Moolabala padai, resembled the mouth of Lord Tirumāl who consumed and kept in His belly, the mountains, the sea and all other things in the universe and disgorged them later. Unable to bear the weight of the rutting elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry of the Moolabala padai, the thousand-hooded serpent, Ādisesha, shuddered.

Like the destabilised Devas who were terrified at the sight of the Hālāhala poison, the vānaras shook with fear when they saw these Rākshasa forces and stampeded towards the northern shore of the sea. *It could be said that the Cakravala mountain served as the fence with the seven seas as the net to catch the beasts known as the Rākshasās, with Yama serving Rāma, a master hunter!* It was impossible to say whether the clamour that rose was caused by the rolling chariots or the trumpeting elephants or the neighing horses or the musical instruments. The Devas saw the world, the vast army, the dome of the sky, the huge regions and the omnipresent flags of the Rākshasās. Nowhere did they see any empty space. They began to sweat and tremble, wondering whether all beings other than themselves had taken the form of Rākshasās and gone to the front with war-weapons, or whether the seven seas full of waves had created innumerable creatures of different forms. They approached Lord Siva and told Him, "O Lord, we are afraid and unable to find a place of refuge. These Rākshasās will consume the lives of all. Even if one thousand Rāmas join and fight for twenty-four years, they will not be able to kill a single one of them. The very question of fighting with them will arise only if one has achieved the stamina to retain one's life after seeing this Moolabala padai!" The Lord replied, "You need have no concern. Victorious Rāma will kill and destroy all these deceitful Rākshasās. It is fate that has brought them all together for their own annihilation!"

Like rats fleeing on sighting huge snakes coming out of snake pits, the vānara warriors trembled and took to their heels on seeing the Moolabala padai. They did not even bother about the heroes, Rāma and Lakshmana! Some ran, across the Sétu, while a few looked for floats to cross the sea. Some others swam across the sea and fled while yet others climbed the trees and remained out of sight. Many entered the caves in the hills. *"Though the Sétu put up by us bridged the sea and helped us, we must now break it and leave, so that the Rākshasās will not be able to follow us," said a few.*

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"Even in the sky the Rākshasās will beat us up," said others. "The Rākshasās have spread out in all the regions created by Lord Brahma," cried a few other terrified vānaras. Sugreeva, Hanuman and Angada, unable to leave Rāma, stayed on. All the other vānaras ran away in confusion. Even the sea full of waves, exceeded its bounds. Rāma who saw all this asked Vibheeshana, "Where were these warriors of the Moolabala padai till now?" The mighty Vibheeshana replied, "This huge army has been collected by bringing all the wild Rākshasās from all the regions and the seven islands. The army which has sprung up like the pralaya sea from the seven worlds below, is part of the Moolabala padai. There is nothing beyond this core army of Rāvana. It is only because of cruel fate, that the furious Rākshasās have joined together and come here to meet their instant death."

With a smile mixed with anger, Rāma told Vibheeshana, "In a moment you will see the ordeal which the Moolabala padai will go through." Rāma then asked Angada to create confidence among the fleeing vānaras. Angada ran fast and told the vānaras, "O frightened vānaras, listen to me. If, even after that, you want to run away, you may do so." The vānara hordes did not listen to Angada. However, because of his forceful words, the mighty senior commanders of the vānara army did. When he asked them why they had run away frightened, they replied, "O lord, you probably have not seen the Moolabala padai. Of what use would we be, dead? Have you forgotten the events that took place when Indrajit was alive? These Rākshasās belonging to the Moolabala padai are in no way inferior to Indrajit. How can Rāma and Lakshmana with their bows, stop even one among them? When even Lord Siva and the Devas, whose duty is to protect the world, have gone into hiding, can Rāma and Lakshmana, with the help of us monkeys vanquish these forces? If the Trinity of Gods and Devendra could kill even one of them in a billion years, it would be more than a victory! O lord, will our seventy vellam army be adequate for a single Rākshasa to eat? We are not mightier than the Devas. We are only small creatures. Perhaps Lord Brahma took a long time to create these Rākshasās. We are already depressed counting the heads and hands of Rāvana as ten and twenty. These Rākshasās who have now reached the battlefield, with their thousand heads and two thousand feet, are greater in number than the grains of sand in the sea! We did not possess enough strength even to hold the arrows dispatched by Kumbhakarna! There are many comparable to him in this Moolabala padai. O commander, you are innocent and young. You have come here disregarding your safety. The prowess of Hanuman and Sugreeva, and the expert archery of Rāma and Lakshmana, are not adequate to save our lives. *Fruits and vegetables are available*

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in plenty. There are caves for us to hide. What does it matter whether this land is ruled by men or by Rākshasās? We can think about fame, only if we stay alive. As our protector, it is your duty to allow us to leave the front and to desist from asking us to lay down our lives in war."

Angada looked at the face of Jāmbavan and said, "O wise one comparable to Hanuman! You had told us that Rāma was none other than Lord Tirumāl, O leader capable of counselling the vānaras! You, too, seem to be frightened without realising your prowess. If you think only of saving your life, what will happen to your fame and learning? Will a real leader ever lose his valour even when caught in the jaws of Yama? We have exhibited fear and earned a blemish. If Yama is to follow us wherever we go, can we escape death? On the other hand, if our lives are extended, even if we consume poison it will become nectar! It is better to die, rather than desert the heroes who sought our help. Did not Vāli who had churned the ocean(which could not be churned by the Devas, Asuras and Lord Tirumāl) lose his life through a single arrow shot by Rāma? Why have you forgotten this? Are you not aware of what happened to the sea because of Rāma's arrows? *These Rākshasās are not wedded to dharma. Have you ever known sins prevailing over boundless virtue? It was improper on your part to have joined these vānaras and deserted Rāma."* Ashamed, Jāmbavan told Angada, "Even Lord Siva is incapable of either confronting or opposing these Rākshasās. How can hunch-backed monkeys, eating flowers and leading a simple life, attract any blemish for running away out of fear? There is nothing that escaped my notice when the Devas and the Asuras fought earlier. In all the three worlds, are there any mightier than these fierce Rākshasās? Even Yama is not strong enough to seek their enmity. I have seen Māli, Māliyavān, Kālanemi, Hiranyan, and the Asura known as Madhu along with Kaidava. *Do they possess the prowess of these mighty Rākshasās who are bestowed with rare boons?* These cruel ones are well versed in sorcery and are experts in handling weapons. Even the Devas dread them. What can monkeys do but become dispirited? Let us go back. Our only dilemma is how to face Rāma." Angada replied, "For those who lead a heroic life, it is proper to fight the enemies, strategically retreat, lay down their lives, or kill the enemies. *I concede that even collectively we will not be able to achieve anything. Still you need not fear! If Rāma, an incarnation of Lord Tirumāl, fights and slays the enemies in this war, we will all be victorious. Otherwise, we will all die with him. It is not proper to leave Rāma and run away."* These words of Angada had the desired effect on Jāmbavan. He said, "We have become blameworthy because we left the battlefield. Let us all go back and fight." All the commanders took the advice

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of Jāmbavan and followed Angada.

Looking at the furious and fierce Moolabala padai, heroic Rāma told Lakshmana, "You know well that whatever be the numerical strength of these Rākshasās, an arrow from my bow will destroy all of them like a bundle of cotton which has fallen into fire. To my knowledge, there is nothing that can prevent it. The army of monkeys will run away in confusion with none to protect them. Till I sever the heads of these Rākshasās, please ensure that the enemies do not approach the vānaras. After sending such an army here, the cruel and clever Rāvana might come and annihilate the vānaras. Lakshmana, there is no archer except you who can prevent Rāvana from doing such a thing. Hanuman, Sugreeva and you, proceed quickly to protect the vānara army. Remember that if you feel anxious about leaving me here alone, we will be defeated in this fierce war." Lakshmana replied, "My Lord, except watching the prowess of your sturdy bow, along with the Devas, there is nothing for us to do here standing by your side!" As Lakshmana was about to leave, Hanuman told Rāma, "Dear father! Please climb on my shoulders and go to the front without brushing me aside as an ordinary monkey. *That will be proper because even when you are left alone, I, humbler than a dog, will not have defaulted in my service to you." Rāma looked at Hanuman and said, "Is there anything that cannot be done by you? How can Lakshmana defeat Rāvana in a close fight without your help? Will not the vānara army perish because of your absence? When Indrajit was engaged in war, on whose strength did I depute Lakshmana to fight with him? Was it not due to my confidence in you? O hero among heroes, Lakshmana will gain more laurels only when he is not separated from you! Protect the vānara army and Lakshmana and Sugreeva. Let the heaven, earth and scriptures be made prosperous by your presence!"* After listening to Rāma, Hanuman left the place without uttering a word, and accompanied Lakshmana. Rāma then addressed Vibheeshana, "You, too, please go with your younger brother, Lakshmana. Explain the treacherous and deceptive acts of the Rākshasās to him and extend your support to our army which deserves to be victorious. Otherwise they will be harmed." Vibheeshana, Sugreeva and others accepted Rāma's advice and went with Lakshmana to guard the vast army of vānaras.

Worshipping his bow with folded hands, the merciful and graceful Rāma twanged it, wore his armour on his sturdy, heroic mountain-like chest, and tied his quiver (containing arrows as everlasting as the four ancient Védas) to his back. The armies of the enemy were spread over a distance of a hundred yōjanas without any gap. The

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front line of the army surrounded Rāma and prevented him from moving out, attacking him with arrows and weapons! The dust that arose completely screened the sky. The Devas who trembled with fear, looked at Rāma and pleaded, "O merciful Lord! O shield protecting humble ones like us! O Lord of unfathomable virtues! You are the power behind the sages who are well-versed in the Védas! None but you can vanquish this army! Please fulfil our prayers by exterminating Rāvana!" The sages and the celestials were distressed to see the solitary Rāma facing the innumerable Rākshasās. Shedding tears, they prayed, *"May Rāma win! Let the sinners be defeated! Let the evils prevailing in the land end today."* The despicable Rākshasās holding fierce weapons commented, "Even after his terror-stricken vānara army fled, this man standing alone, is selecting dreadful arrows to fight with us. This act of his is even greater than achieving victory. Can the words of Māliyavān go wrong? Lord Siva who destroyed the three regions was assisted by several Devas. Lord Tirumāl, when He annihilated the Rākshasās in olden days, had the celestial Garuda as His mount. Whereas, Rāma is now attacking us on foot. We have with us chariots, elephants, lions, yālis, and robust warriors resembling the Meru. Still, this man invites us repeatedly to confront him in battle. *How is he going to survive in the world?"* The Rākshasās surrounded Rāma like a herd of mountainous elephants surrounding a lion. Rāma, the Supreme Lord of the Védas welcomed this. He twanged his mighty bow. The mouths of the Rākshasa heroes became dry. The horses lost their speed. The fierce fighting prowess of the Rākshasās disappeared. The lions and demons became destabilised and smashed the chariots along with their wheels and the horses drawing them. The elephants killed their mahouts and went berserk. All this caused great rumblings in the Rākshasa army. These bad omens made the Rākshasās nervous, while the Devas rejoiced.

Rāma showered arrows (resembling lightning) on the enemy. The yālis drawing the chariots, the charioteers, elephants, mighty horses, demons, warriors and their chariots, bows and arrows, were incessantly attacked by the shower of arrows dispatched by Rāma. As a result, a great deal of dust rose. Proud elephants fell dead on the ground like big mountains, galloping horses fell dead like the severed red heads of the Rākshasās, and bows fell down (with their stems sundered) like torn flags. The fierce silver-like teeth of the Rākshasās fell on the ground as if the phases of the moon had dropped from the sky onto the earth. While the seasonal wind blew on all four sides, Rāma's arrows, resembling a cluster of rain-bearing summer clouds, caused the death of elephants, mighty horses and warriors. While Rāma's innumerable arrows destroyed and sundered the eyes, hands, bodies, accursed mouths, shoulders and

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trembling legs of the Rākshasās, the weapons used by them on him did not harm him. An arrow from Rāma, multiplied into a hundred arrows and attacked the target. As a result, the Rākshasās who had relied on their rare boons, found that the front line horses and their hooves were severed, and their eyes, mouths, teeth and big chests were smashed. These horses, unable to run, died in the battlefield. The enemy chariots could not even crawl because their progress was impeded by heaps of corpses. Even after these chariots managed to move, thousands of Rāma's arrows reduced them to hundreds of pieces. The fierce elephants could do nothing as they were attacked by Rāma's arrows and collapsed even before they were touched by them. The arrows dispatched by Rāma developed into burning balls of fire which squeezed the lives out of crores of Rākshasās. *While Lord Brahma could not keep track of the number of those who died, the speed with which Yama accomplished his task of snatching the lives of those killed in the battlefield was amazing.*

The series of speedy, sharp arrows emitting fire destroyed the locks of hair of crores of Rākshasās. The flags hoisted over their chariots and their rutting elephants were burnt like a forest struck by lightning and thunder during summer. The spears and swords of the enemy, cut into pieces by Rāma's arrows, fell into the sea, and 'drank' its water to get rid of their heat. Rāma's sharp arrows resembled Lord Siva's raging arrows which had once burnt the three citadels of the Asuras. Heaps of heads of angry Rākshasas with their lips tightly drawn in, like clefts in rocks struck by thunder rolled on the ground. The celestials moved hither and thither, fearing that the heads of the Rākshasās that rose upwards (severed by Rāma's arrows) might hit them. The terrestrials, too, became nervous that these severed heads might fall on them like hailstones. The sundered bodies of the deceitful Rākshasās rose up and filled the sky and then fell on the ground like clouds full of rain. Some of the Rākshasa warriors threw divine darts, some shot scorching arrows, some hurled weapons, some attacked right and left with stones, and some proceeded hastily, shouting at Rāma that they would kill him. Unable to find weapons, some hurled abuses, some blustered and some dashed hither and thither! Among the countless Rākshasās holding long weapons, some raised a clamour like the rain-bearing clouds revolving around the sun, some fought, some hurled weapons continuously, some threw spears with three prongs, some hid, a few stared furiously ejecting fire through their eyes and some others dug up tall mountains. All the weapons and mountains thus hurled, destroyed and damaged only the violent hands of the Rākshasās and the chariots surrounding Rāma!

Possessing mighty shoulders, Rāma came out unscathed like the sun coming out of

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unending darkness. His innumerable arrows powdered the Rākshasās' armour, severed the Rākshasās into pieces, cut their bows and heads, destroyed their prowess, broke into bits the rocks thrown by them, and cut their hands as well as the trees hurled by them. The Devas commented, "Hit by Rāma's arrows, the mountainous elephants have lost their legs, tails, tusks, trunks, necks and the seats on their backs, and have suffered severely." *But the Devas failed to observe that these elephants also lost their rutting pleasure and their rutting fluid and forfeited their arrogance.* Despite the fact that crores of spears and arrows were hurled and shot, and mountain-like elephants and rolling chariots fought, a solitary Rāma destroyed them all with fury. Countless Rākshasa archers aimed at a single superb archer (Rāma) and simultaneously shot a shower of arrows. In return, Rāma dispatched rain-like arrows which reduced to dust the arrows shot by the Rākshasās and made them lose their heads. *Even Rākshasās who possessed the might of a hundred thousand rogue elephants, lost their mountainous bodies the moment a single arrow of Rāma's touched them.* Attacking with precision, Rāma's fierce arrows destroyed the tridents, mountains, discs, curved clubs and spears hurled by the Rākshasās, shattered their teeth, killed the horses and rogue elephants and demolished the chariots!

Yama, capable of consuming the lives of the world at a stretch, had come to the front with his messengers. As they had only two legs, they became tired with constant movement and could not return with the countless lives snatched on the battlefield! The blood that flowed from the bodies of the dead, fell on the graceful chest of Rāma, who, with his sturdy bow, resembled the pralaya sun scorching the earth and containing it. Rāma looked as if he had bathed himself in the blood of his enemies! While the Rākshasās killed by his arrows were like flies, Rāma resembled honey! His archery resulted in many Rākshasās losing their lives, some running away destabilised, some escaping alive, many fighting willingly, many rolling on the ground, many getting burnt and charred, many getting up, some falling down, many pushing in their severed bowels and many losing their heads. The ornaments worn on the bodies of severed warriors, namely, shining gem-set ear-rings, epaulettes, lustrous crowns, graceful bracelets, armour, and anklets fell down, appearing like streaks of lightning from a cluster of moist clouds. Looking at Rāma's swift movements, the Rākshasās commented, "He is in front of us. He is behind us. He is in front of the army and inside the army. He is on either side of us. He is visible over our heads and over the mountains. He is also seen over the sky! How fast does he move?" Everyone thought that a single Rāma had multiplied himself into many Rāmas as he appeared to be

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omnipresent. Leonine Rāma holding a golden bow was in the midst of the sea-like army. Yet he was seen as a shadow following the dark army of enemies. The Rākshasās had mastered sorcery and were able to hide their forms by creating illusions. *Rāma made all of them feel that he was not only inside them, but outside them as well!* Unaware that he was moving about in the various divisions, and that he had penetrated deep into the army of Rākshasās, the Devas felt that Rāma had suspended fighting! They did not realise that he was shooting speedy arrows cutting the cruel Rākshasās into pieces. Attacked by his arrows, the rogue elephants along with the seats on their backs and the cloth banners touching the sky, sank into the sea of blood, like ships sinking in a vast ocean. Severed by Rāma's arrows, the rock-like heads of Rākshasās full of deceitful thoughts, became hot. They rose and fell like wooden balls tossed by the goddess of war with her red hands! In that wide front, the fighting hands of the enemy adorned with ornaments and lustrous shields were found scattered, along with heaps of warriors' heads with tumbai garlands. *The severed teeth of the Rākshasās entered the bellies of elephants like the crescent moon entering the clouds in the sky.* The curved teeth of the gallant warriors and the white tusks of mountainous elephants which looked like crescent moons of several days, were scattered all over the huge battlefield.

Full was the sky with the lives of the Rākshasās, full was the sea with the blood flowing from the bodies of the warriors lying dead in the battlefield, full was the land with their severed bodies, and full were the eyes of the Devas with tears of joy on seeing Rāma's masterly archery! The scattered weapons hurled by the furious Rākshasās were dragged by the flood of blood into the sea, where they spread all over and sundered all objects that came in front of them. In the process, countless were the fishes which lost their lives! Vanni, the leader of the Rākshasās, looked at his warriors and asked, "How is Rāma able to oppose our great army single-handed and slay our warriors? Mighty as we are, do we merely indulge in blustering without any chance of winning? If all of us fall on Rāma before his arrows penetrate us, we can kill him. You Rākshasās appearing like black clouds seem to be aghast, having lost your senses!" Vanni, hoping to help his leader Rāvana, asked his fellow warriors to pounce upon Rāma. The Rākshasa army soon surrounded Rāma and showered weapons on him, like clouds surrounding a mountain and showering torrential rains. He in turn, showered a rain of arrows which cut the weapons hurled by the Rākshasās into pieces, grounded the chariots and elephants, cut the horses up and made the weapons of their riders fall scattered. The demons sang and danced. The fire in their mouths looked like

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lighthouses guiding ships stranded on the high seas. Mother Earth wore a red garment. The big sea was inundated with blood and fat. The scene looked like red Kōlams (designs drawn on the ground on auspicious occasions). The lone bow of Rāma, bent like the crescent moon, turned the seven separate seas of salt, honey, ghee, yoghurt, milk, cane-juice, and pure water into a single sea of blood! Even though he shot one arrow at a time, the arrows that flew were a crore.

Rākshasās who hurled weapons, who shouted aloud, who tried to stop Rāma's arrows, who were depressed, who faced defeat, who moved fast like rutting elephants, who were furious and arrogant and who shot arrows with great rage, succumbed to Rāma's arrows and fell. A thousand bright arrows shot by Rāma would kill not just a thousand warriors but would destroy tens of thousands of them, whereas the Rākshasās appeared to shoot arrows only to kill themselves! *Rāma's sharp lustrous arrows resembled the pralaya submarine fire, while the Rākshasās resembled the dense forest full of trees scorched by that fire. Rāma's arrows acted like nets cast on the sea to catch fish, while the army of annihilated Rākshasās resembled shoals of fish caught in the tides of the sea. Rāma looked like the hurricane which blows at the end of a yuga, while the Rākshasās opposing him were like the mountains reduced to powder by that hurricane! Rāma was like an omnipresent boiling sea which destroyed all beings contained in it, while the suffering Rākshasās were like those very beings who were destroyed. Rāma resembled pralaya, while the Rākshasās resembled all perishable animate and inanimate objects! Rāma looked like the Hālāhala rising from the roaring sea, while the Rākshasās were like the fishes about to die. The Rākshasās steeped in vice and crime were like those indulging in deceitful acts, amassing wealth by foul means and tendering false evidence where justice is dispensed, but Rāma was like the divine dharma about to annihilate these Rākshasās. Rāma was like water mixed with poison, while the Rākshasās were like those who drank such water during a famine and lost their lives.*

With a hundred vellam army on the verge of dying, blood inundated the city of Lanka, without any distinction between lowland and highland. Deer-like Rākshasis possessing deceitful eyes ran into and out of the fort in confusion! The flood of blood spread like the wide sea and flowed beyond the bounds of all the regions. Hundreds of crores of Rākshasās blocked Rāma's passage! Enemy commanders, chariots, yālis, horses and lions, were directed towards him. Rāma looked at those commanders and said, "Come before me and give up your great boons and lives." The Rākshasās threw

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lustrous weapons, which flashed like lightning, at Rāma. He shot back arrows which were like the scorching sea, opposed the entire clan of Rākshasās, single-handed, and stopped them from advancing. The arrogant Rākshasās collectively pressed forward towards Rāma, after showering arrows on him. When Rāma was hemmed in on all sides by the arrows of the Rākshasās and was totally screened, the frightened Devas approached Lord Siva, paid homage to Him and said, "Countless commanders of the Moolabala padai, with capabilities and valour thrice as much as that of Rāvana's, have begun to destroy everything. Rāma is all alone. These Rākshasās had earlier denied victory to us. Even before Rāma's arrows can reach them, the enemies sunder the arrows. The Rākshasās have surrounded the seven worlds like black clouds. They can only be slain through curses. It is hard even for you and Lord Tirumāl to vanquish them with weapons." *Lord Siva replied, "Do not fear. Whatever be the strength of the Rākshasa forces, they will certainly perish like a bundle of cotton on fire. Even if poison wins over nectar and virtues are overtaken by vices, it is beyond the prowess of these treacherous Rākshasās to defeat Rāma. Except Vibheeshana, will even a single Rākshasa survive? Only when there is compassion, will virtue prosper. You need not run about looking for caves to hide any more. Rāma the furious tiger, along with Sugreeva and the vānara kings, will kill these Rākshasās before noon."* These words were endorsed by Lord Brahma. The Devas were relieved of their anxiety.

Shooting long, victorious and speedy arrows, Rāma slew the Rākshasās and cut off their heads creating heaps resembling mountains. The wicked sea of Rākshasās surrounding Rāma, died in the battlefield and reached heaven making it shrink in size. Handsome Rāma welcomed the enemy army as if he was offering his hospitality in a traditional manner and shot a rain of scorching arrows spitting fire. Gem-studded chariots with Rākshasās inside, were all burnt to ashes along with the horses. The sun changed its orbit, mountains shook, the nearby sea shifted, the hot sun and the cool moon exchanged their roles and the world revolved like a potter's wheel in consonance with Rāma's sturdy-shouldered spinning body! Several varieties of demons, Yama, Rāma's strong bow, dharma, the Trinity of Gods, the Devas and the sages danced for joy. Extolling Rāma, the Védas said, "O Supreme Lord of virtues! O Lord possessing the colour of the purple flower! None of the Devas will ever be able to discern for certain the manner of your fighting! Even the Trinity of Gods tremble at the sight of this war fought by you!" Rāma felt that the dwindling army of Rākshasās might hide in a corner. To prevent this, he created a fence of long arrows, which could not be crossed even by the mighty such as victorious Māli, Māliyavan, Kaidava and Madhu.

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The Rākshasās observed, "Though we could not be destroyed even by Lord Siva, Lord Tirumāl and Devendra, a solitary man has been able to destroy our rare boons, determination and bodies, and terminate our lives. Even one amongst us would have been enough to resist the whole world in a battle. We had a thousand vellam warriors. But still, Rāma was able to kill all in a split second with his arrows. Crores of Rākshasās in this mighty army, who had once forced the Devas to take to their heels, have been slain by a solitary arrow, casting a slur on our race. *Coming to think of it, we have not seen the deceptive Lord Tirumāl in the recent divine congregations. Only Lord Siva, Lord Brahma and other Devas were present. Therefore, this Rāma is none other than Tirumāl creating illusions.*" Listening to these words, Vanni said, "If we retreat in fear, how can we face Rāvana? Why should we keep on blaming ourselves? To attain fame, we must opt for self-destruction and take a new birth. It is difficult to escape from Rāma's prison of arrows. The only course open to us, is to rally round, fight fiercely and die." Like strong and speedy rivers falling into the sea, like insects dying before a flame, the Rākshasās, *propelled by cruel destiny,* surrounded Rāma with a clamour. They showered tridents, clubs, arrows, discs, ploughs, swords, lances, véls, spears and caltrops, on tiger-like Rāma's body. On his part, Rāma selected the divine dart known as Kāntaroopam, and shot it with precision. The fiery dart left his bow furiously like Ādisesha the king of serpents and Garuda the king of eagles and multiplied into a rain of arrows possessing three eyes and five faces, resembling Lord Siva's. *The Moolabala padai of Rāvana (who had done penance) consisting of ten crore Rākshasa kings and their formidable armies, was annihilated before a syllable could be uttered!*

More Rākshasa warriors came to the front from the seven big islands, the eight regions, the abyss where the serpents lived, the mountains and several other places. They all had great love for Rāvana. They told Vanni, "If Rāma can defeat any one of us, he is certain to vanquish Rāvana. Please tell us whether we should fight jointly, or individually." Vanni replied that despite all their prowess, it would be impossible to defeat Rāma if they did not combine and fight hard. The Rākshasās agreed, "Wise Vanni's advice alone is good." They raised a clamour like the roar of the seven seas and blew conches so loudly that it seemed as if the sky full of lightning would come down. Slapping their shoulders, they arrived at the battlefield. *Rāma twanged his bow, raising a sound similar to that coming from the Conch of Lord Tirumāl, a sound that spread throughout the world.* The new army of Rākshasās consisted of several crores of warriors who were experts in various martial arts. Along with these warriors, those who had conquered the worlds, those possessing the might of the Devas, those who

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had slain hordes of mighty enemies resembling the sea and those who had, like Yama, consumed many lives, moved closely towards Rāma. After surrounding him, the warriors raised a clamour, indulged in different types of fighting and tried to peg Rāma down, which was like attempting to tie a rutting elephant. The flames from the burning weapons hurled by the Rākshasās and the fire that arose from their furious eyes, combined and rose together, scorching the seven worlds. All these warriors were individually equal to Rāvana in their prowess. Heroic Rāma readily confronted them. The discs and arrows shot by these warriors were broken and destroyed by a volley of Rāma's arrows resembling the torrential pralaya rains. The Rākshasās died along with their chariots, as if the crimson sun along with its halo, had fallen down. *Rāma's lethal arrows, emitting flames of fire, leapt forward followed by the teeth of Yama.* The Rākshasās' mighty arms, severed by Rāma's arrows with the bows held by them, fell like clouds with lightning; their hands holding weapons fell into the sea of blood like hissing serpents with the branches of the trees where they lived; their heroic right hands holding lustrous swords fell into the sea of blood and rose up like sharks!

Dragged by the northern wind, in that galloping war, big flags with their poles fell into the dark sea of blood like the sails of ships sinking into the sea along with their masts. The severed arms which were carried by the arrows into the flood of blood, throbbed like sharks with strong thorny noses. Attacked by the arrows, shining wheels (separated from the chariots) falling into the stream of blood looked like the bright moon dipping into the sea! Rāma's arrows entered the armour covering the Rākshasās' chests, like bees entering beehives to suck sweet honey. Within a quarter of a day, Rāma killed Rākshasās who filled a distance of a hundred yōjanas, making the vultures hover around. *Facing some, opposing many and moving everywhere, Rāma appeared like Lord Narasimhamurti who had slain Hiranyan, the father of Prahlada who realised God.* As Rāma was revolving rapidly, he was seen everywhere. The Rākshasās shot their arrows furiously at him but missed. Out of disappointment, they all lost their lives. The dazzling light from his arrows made the Rākshasās mistake night for day. They felt that there were as many Rāmas as there were grains of sand on the sea-shore. *In that huge army of tall mountain-like Rākshasās, each one of them appeared to the other as Rāma, and they consumed one another's lives making one wonder whether unique Rāma had to kill anyone at all!* Watching omnipresent Rāma, the Rākshasās were baffled. The jingling sound from the bells on Rāma's mighty bow was terrifying and caused the death of horses and rutting elephants and damaged the mountainous chariots. Tears of sorrow flowed profusely from the broad eyes of the

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wives of the tiger-like Rākshasās when they realised that disaster awaited their husbands. With the death of every thousand elephants, ten million horses and thousand warriors, and the destruction of every ten thousand chariots, one headless trunk would dance in the battlefield. With the dancing of one thousand such headless trunks, the bells on Rāma's bow (Kōdandam) would ring sweetly once. Such bells rang continuously in this war, for three hours. *The 'havoc' caused by Rāma's Kōdandam could well be imagined!*

Facing the Rākshasās with his bent bow, leonine Rāma made the dead warriors going to heaven board the chariots, and reduced all the other chariots of the opposing army to the level of his own chariot, the ground! The bow that attacked the foes, was only a single bow. The quiver holding the arrows was also only one. *Yet, the shower of arrows shot by that Lord, were many times more than the innumerable drops of rain!* Flawless Rāma executed acts which normally required at least a thousand hands. It was indeed strange to see a thousand hands fused into just two hands! Watching this, the Rākshasās observed, "The form that we see before us cannot be that of a solitary man. How can it counter all the nuances of war displayed by a thousand vellam warriors? *It is obvious that the faces of Rāma are not just a thousand, but infinite.*" Lord Siva and Lord Brahma undertook the task of counting the number of arrows shot by Rāma, but gave it up as impossible! Their shoulders swelled with happiness. The strength of the army of Rākshasās that took part in the war was a thousand vellams. It would not be correct to say that an equal number of arrows was shot at them, because each Rākshasa body was cut into a hundred pieces! While the Devas wondered who else except Rāma could shoot so many arrows, the sages wondered whether there was any expert who could accurately count the number of destructive arrows dispatched by Rāma!

"Why should we use ordinary weapons and get killed, with crores of warriors running away sobbing? Instead, we shall cover Rāma's divine body with celestial weapons and kill him," said the Rākshasās moving close to him. Accordingly, they shot darts dedicated to Lord Tirumāl and Lord Brahma. Even the sky became destabilised. Rāma, with an exquisite smile, shot identical darts and countered them. Wanting to avoid scorching the world with divine weapons, Rāma chose crores of ordinary arrows and sundered the Rākshasās' heads, like thunder striking mountains. Devendra was happy as if he himself wore the garland of victory. The four Védas prospered, while Ādisesha heaved a sigh of relief. *Commanded by his mother, Kaikeyi, Rāma had given*

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up the wealth of the throne, proceeded to the forest and removed the sufferings of all by his prowess in archery. To such a Rāma, anyone who possessed a mouth, offered felicitations and homage on that day of his unique achievement. With flowers in their hands, the Devas worshipped Rāma who resembled Lord Siva standing alone in the cremation ground. The battlefield looked like a world inhabited by the Rākshasās. Rāma, who was standing in the battlefield, looked like Lord Tirumāl. The Devas showered pure fresh flowers and sandalwood paste on him, which removed the strain caused by his fight. Rāma, the Lord of compassion, after annihilating the Rākshasās, left the battlefield, and proceeded towards the front where Lakshmana was being opposed by Rāvana.

We have described in detail how Rāma fought and demolished the Moolabala padai. Now, let us narrate the activities of the army of vānaras, who had run away but had later returned, and the activities of Rāvana who fought the vānaras fiercely. We will also detail the flawless and fierce warfare employed by Lakshmana.

31. A VÉL BORNE

The vānara leaders decided to sacrifice their lives in the battlefield, reach the heroes' heaven and wipe out the blemish that had overtaken them. Accordingly, they marched towards the front. They looked like a big sea being relocated. In the mean time, resplendent Rāvana with his destructive bow and his quiver full of deadly arrows, sped towards the front in a swift thousand-wheeled chariot drawn by a thousand well-bridled trim horses. Leonine Rāvana was accompanied by a hundred crore chariots, two hundred crore galloping horses, ten crore rutting elephants, and a horde of warriors twice as many as the rest of the army. As though a call was being given to all the Rākshasās in the three worlds and beyond to come to the battlefield and join the war, huge war-drums boomed and conches blared. The din made by trumpets was heard in all the seven worlds above and below. Watching the vast army of the Rākshasās and Rāvana, the vānaras thought that it was proper for them to lay down their lives in the war for the sake of Rāma. Slapping their shoulders loudly and frightening even Yama, they took huge boulders in their hands, raised a loud clamour and attacked the Rākshasās. As a result, fire broke out and blood flowed profusely towards the sea like melted copper. Mighty heads severed from bodies coursed through the sky, dripping blood on the clouds and making the whole world look like the front.

Shot by Lakshmana's arrows, rutting elephants cast away their face-plates, became

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weak and collapsed with their bowels floating in the sea of blood. The swan-like Rākshasis thought of the smiles that used to appear on their husbands' faces when they made love, and wept. Surveying the front which became the dying ground of warriors, Rāvana felt that the pride of his great army would soon come to an end. The trees and rocks hurled by the vānara army countered the bows, swords, tridents, sling-shots and spears of the Rākshasās and also destroyed their heads, forcing them to scatter. In another corner of the front, the strong and valiant archer, Lakshmana, and Hanuman fought together closely, killing a number of elephants whose eyes were spewing fire. *Those who saw Lakshmana moving about with his bow, mistook him for Yama and said, "Even Yama seems to have a bow!"* Hanuman's nails and teeth grew sharper, decimating the Rākshasa army! Watching the destruction of his army, Rāvana feared that if he delayed further, Yama would consume the rest of the Rākshasās. Declaring that he would kill his enemies at once and go back victorious, Rāvana shot a series of arrows which were like the messengers of Yama! These scorching arrows had the speed of wind, broke the mountains, drilled through the worlds and measured the regions. *Rāvana looked ferocious like the midnight Kāli, while the angry vānaras were like silk cotton which disappears, blown by wind!*

Lakshmana stopped the vānaras from fleeing, and repeatedly shouted, "Fear not." Boarding his 'chariot' (Hanuman's shoulders), Lakshmana faced Rāvana and fought with him. Rāvana shot more than a hundred crores of fiery arrows which were easily shattered by Lakshmana's arrows. Dispatching another series of arrows, Rāvana aimed them at Lakshmana's broad shoulders and chest. Even after ten such arrows pierced his body, Lakshmana did not care. He shot back speedy arrows which were hard to intercept. *Rāvana reduced all of them to powder. Even so, he thought, "It is indeed difficult to vanquish Lakshmana. He cannot be defeated by an ordinary army. Not only can he withstand divine darts, but he can also defeat anyone in a straight combat. He is capable of matching Yama's prowess. This Lakshmana, like his brother Rāma, can burn all the worlds and has not lost to anyone in battle.* There is a dart, created by Lord Brahma in ancient times, which can prevent even the victory of Lord Siva. Let me use it on Lakshmana" Rāvana offered a silent prayer to that divine dart and shot it speedily at mighty Lakshmana. Seeing this, Vibheeshana went quickly to Lakshmana and advised him to reply with the dart dedicated to Lord Vishnu. Accordingly, Lakshmana neutralised Rāvana's 'divine' dart. Rāvana, furious that his designs were being thwarted by Vibheeshana, decided to kill him with a thunder-like vél presented to him by Mayan (at the time he gave his daughter in marriage). This vél was created

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by Lord Brahma during a yāga and was as powerful as Devendra's Vajrāyudham and Mahāvishnu's Cakra. Scorching the enemies, the weapon would return only after destroying the target even if it were Lord Brahma Himself. Rāvana worshipped the vél and hurled it with great speed at his brother Vibheeshana.

Vibheeshana, who knew of the prowess of the vél, told Lakshmana that it was certain to kill him. Lakshmana reassured Vibheeshana and said, "I will find a way to stop it." Lakshmana then used his arrows and other weapons. *All these perished like worthless abuses hurled at a noble soul with great penances to his credit!* The Devas became concerned. Offering himself before the vél, Lakshmana said, "Even if I have to give up my life, I shall save Vibheeshana who sought refuge with us. This act of mine will bring me everlasting fame. Dharma will follow me even to the heavenly abode. All good persons will extol my noble act. Before any blemish can come to me, I shall bear the vél on my bosom." While Lakshmana tried to take on Rāvana's vél, Vibheeshana hastened to receive it. Setting them aside, Angada came forward. While Sugreeva preceeded Angada, Hanuman overtook everyone and went forward to receive the vél on his body. It is impossible to describe the agony suffered by all of them in the battlefield that day. Suddenly Lakshmana moved with the speed of wind and made everyone else stand behind him. He asked them to keep off, promising to deal with the vél. Lakshmana bore Rāvana's vel which pierced him and came out through his back. The Devas wept at the sight. As Rāvana was moving away, Vibheeshana asked him where he was going. With the fury of a lion, he leapt into Rāvana's chariot, killed the charioteer and the horses drawing the chariot, and hit Rāvana with a mace. Rāvana deserted his chariot, rose furiously into the air, shot ten wild arrows at Vibheeshana and a thousand at Hanuman. Declaring that the war was over, he got ready to return to the city of Lanka.

Vibheeshana looked furiously at Rāvana and said, "It is only because Lakshmana offered me refuge that he allowed his body to be pierced by the vél. You dare not escape through deceptive means. I will fight with you, kill you and die with you." Rāvana felt that having achieved victory, there was no point in killing Vibheeshana, a 'cow'. Ignoring him, Rāvana entered the golden-walled city of Lanka. *After Rāvana's departure, Vibheeshana wept aloud and fell at Lakshmana's feet shedding tears. He was the embodiment of compassion and grief.* The army of vānaras, and their commanders were drowned in a sea of sorrow. Vibheeshana, in utter grief, exclaimed, "What is the purpose of my living, when Lakshmana lies dying? After his death, even Rāma will

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not live." Jāmbavan intervened and said, "Is it sensible to be concerned about the life of Lakshmana when we have with us Hanuman who has the prowess of flying past all the worlds in a moment and bringing the medicinal herbs through his unique efforts? Further, Lakshmana appears to be breathing. There is, therefore, no need for any concern." Jāmbavan removed all the arrows stuck on the body of Hanuman and told him, "Why do you delay in bringing the medicinal herbs with the mountain? Can Rāma bear the suffering of Lakshmana?" Hanuman immediately proceeded north and brought the mountain with the medicinal herbs as he had done earlier. Even before the scent of the herbs touched Lakshmana's body, he regained consciousness. Amidst a clamour from the celestials, Lakshmana rose, embraced Hanuman and said, "Dear father, I hope Vibheeshana has not fallen." Then he looked at the elderly Vibheeshana and was rid of his concern. Lakshmana was happy that Rāvana would die soon and Seeta would be freed. Those who surrounded Lakshmana and Vibheeshana said, "The wise say dharma is unique. Looking at the manner in which Hanuman has followed this dharma, it is certain that nothing is impossible for Rāma. While dharma is bound to win, sin is bound to lose." Crossing several sky-high mountains of corpses and a sea of blood, everyone rose up, went to Rāma and offered worship at his divine feet. Rāma wanted to know all that had happened. *Jāmbavan impressively narrated everything. Rāma embraced Hanuman and said, "After obtaining you, what is there that I have not obtained? May you live long with no impediments!"* When Lakshmana saw Rāma, he experienced a unique feeling of ecstasy, and shed torrential tears of joy. Feeling as if his life was outside his body, he saw in Rāma his father, Dasaratha, returning from heaven. *When he paid his respects to Rāma, the latter embraced him and said, "Your generosity in offering your life to protect one who had sought our refuge, befits our dynasty. What you did was not only an outstanding act, it was a timely one, too. Even Emperor Sibi, a divine embodiment of virtue who offered his own flesh to save a dove, would be unequal to you. I cannot offer a better comparison! When confronted with the sufferings of those who seek succour, great benefactors should treat them with the compassion shown by a cow to her calf."* Removing his heavy armour, Rāma handed over his bow to the victorious Hanuman. Resting on a mountain caressed by clouds, he freed himself from his fatigue.

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32. THE VĀNARAS SEE THE FRONT

Accompanied by his huge army, Sugreeva approached Rāma and paid obeisance to him. The vānaras, were surprised to see heaps of Rākshasa corpses and trembled with fear. The sturdy-shouldered Sugreeva asked Rāma in astonishment how he had managed to overcome the huge army of Rākshasās. *Rāma replied, "Visit the front along with Vibheeshana, and see for yourself."* All the vānara commanders paying homage to Rāma, keenly desired to see the front and went with Vibheeshana. When they saw the entire place filled with vultures, demons and innumerable crows, the vānaras were frightened and began to prattle, tremble, shout and weep. Slowly they recovered and raised their heads in great jubilation. They told Vibheeshana, "The cruel Rākshasās have filled the space, as if the seven seas with leaping waves have merged into one vast sea. All their kith and kin, watching the corpses, sob in fear. Even a thousand years are inadequate to fully see the havoc caused! Please tell us what exactly happened."

Vibheeshana replied, "My dear ones! In that part of the battlefield where there is a canopy of crows, the entire place is replete with carcasses of elephants which were killed by arrows blessed by Yama. The whole area is filled up like mountains covered completely by clouds. The lives of the red-eyed Rākshasās who were victorious earlier were snatched by Rāma's speedy arrows, one overtaking the other. Rākshasa corpses have fallen over those elephants heaped like the seven hills, reminding one of prides of lions sleeping on snake-infested mountains! Look at the bright faces of those Rākshasās who have gladly lost their lives to merciful Rāma's arrows. Those three rutting elephants, though alive even after being hit by Rāma's arrows, are drowned in that sea of blood because they could not stand up. They resemble whales dipping into the sea and surfacing! Those sturdy chariots with white flags, attacked by Rāma's thunderous arrows, have lost their horses and are being dragged by the flood of blood. They resemble ships with masts floating in the sea, whose waves dash against the shore and roll back. My dear ones! Shot by Rāma's arrows, two elephants have fallen together, one on its front and the other on its back, appearing like a strange beast with heads on both sides of the body. Look at the white tusks of those tall elephants that are standing, not in rows but separately, in the flood of blood. They resemble the premature silverish crescent moon seen inside the bright clouds. In those chariots (where flags, bows, arrows and spears had been heaped) and on the leather seats on the backs of those rock-like elephants, fierce Rākshasās slain by Rāma, lie dead. The fire that came out of their eyes provided baked

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flesh for the demons. After eating it, they have bloated and are now dancing happily! O dear ones! You can see the sharks moving away out of fear, wondering what those dead mountainous elephants carried into the sea (by the flood of blood) really are. Shot by Rāma's arrows, the Rākshasās, who were on chariots, on the backs of elephants and on horses, and also moving closely through the sky, bled profusely. You can see the flow of blood imparting its hue to the sun even though it is at its zenith! Fresh blood oozing from Rākshasa corpses, like a sea of blood drenching the sky and the earth, has caused a change of colour in the glittering, fragrant star-like flowers and the bees sucking fragrant nectar. The waves in the sea of blood dash against the shore, which has pearls, gems and the tusks of rutting elephants, all heaped in one place. The waves have also dragged away trees with their branches and the birds resting on them. The big river of blood has carried in its flow, flags, royal white umbrellas and chowries, en route to the sea which dashes against the shore full of corpses. Look at those countless pools of blood with tuskers, sturdy Rākshasa shoulders resembling rocks, horses clustered round wavy creepers, the crocodilian trunks of elephants, lotus creepers looking like lustrous faces, green leaves resembling slippery bowels, and that mass of fat capable of dragging everything into it. In the mire of fat ploughed by the sword, blood-like water stagnates with elephants resting in it like buffaloes.

"The bodies of Rākshasās resembling elephants that have broken away from the posts to which they were tied, and the effects of the thunderous twang of Rāma's bow causing whirlpools in the blood flowing like a river and carrying elephants in its flow, can be seen over there. Rāma's arrows (besides severing the hands, legs, dark necks, mighty shoulders, and chests of Rākshasās) have moved fast in all directions, not tarrying for a moment on the bodies of rutting elephants, victorious horses, or the vast sea of Rākshasās after piercing them, but falling onto the ground splitting it. Killed with their mahouts those ten crore Yama-like elephants whose rutting fluid has the fragrance of a lotus, are not ordinary ones, because they arose from the ocean of milk along with the nectar of immortality. The other set of crores of rutting elephants, which you see yonder, appeared during Lord Brahma's yāga. The fourteen crore elephants seen here, though drained of their lives and blood, are not drained of their rutting saliva. They belong to the herd of the bellicose Irāvatam, the royal mount of Devendra. Several crores of elephants seen here possessing eyes that do not blink (like the Devas), belong to a special clan of rutting elephants hailing from the northern region. All these were once offered as presents to Rāvana by Devendra. Shot by Rāma's arrows, those horses (surrendered by Kubera) lying dead by the thousands are the horses that rose, when the ocean of milk was churned. The ones here, numbering several crores, were

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captured when the furious and valiant leader of the celestials (known as Vinjayas) was defeated." Vibheeshana was interrupted by the vānaras. They said, "Whether we ourselves try to see, or are shown all the scenes here, we will not be able to survey the entire front. It may be easier to scan even the Himalayas! We will pursue this task later. *For the present, we will all go and see Rāma, the incarnation of Lord Tirumāl."* The vānaras then went to Rāma, paid homage to him, and heaved a deep sigh wondering at the unique prowess of Rāma in the art of warfare!

33. RĀVANA VISITS THE FRONT

Rāvana was keen to arrange a feast and provide delicious food for those who out of love for him, had donned their war attire and had actively engaged themselves in war. While the celestials were invited, the Dānavas came of their own accord! Rāvana directed the cooks to prepare food for the distinguished guests and warned them that they would lose their lives if anything was wanting. Choice liquor, meat and other articles of food, costly robes, sandalwood paste, fragrant flowers, water for bathing and fine beds were provided in abundance inside and outside the palace for all the guests. Celestial women arrived to rub scented oils into the hair of the guests, bathe them with fragrant water, feed them with delicious food and wine, and spread the beds for them. Some of the celestial women sang, danced, gesticulated and offered worldly comforts to the guests. Thanks to these women, all the Rākshasās, whether of royal or humble lineage, had a taste of the pleasures enjoyed by Devendra. As the Rākshasās were making merry, messengers from the front arrived. They paid homage to Rāvana and furtively spoke into his ears. With their tongues dry, with ebbing breath, and fighting hard to overcome their inability to speak, the trembling messengers told Rāvana in despair, "O conqueror of the celestials! The thousand vellam warriors sent by you, were all destroyed in seven nāzhigais by the curse of Rāma's bow. Those who are feasting here are the only survivors! If you think you can compel the Devas to serve and entertain you and your clan, this is not the time for it! Realise that, except for those who are in the city none amongst your clan are alive. *If you must offer feast, it can only be a sacrificial feast for those who laid down their lives in the war for your sake."*

Rāvana, who had been full of incomparable ecstasy, became distressed and frightened. He sighed deeply. He became furious. His red eyes flashed fire. Flabbergasted he said, "The Rākshasās of the Moolabala padai, were all mightier than me. None of them could ever die. Greater in number than the grains of sand in the sea, they were countless. You lie, when you say that they have all been killed!" Māliyavān

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who was near by said, "Is it fair to doubt what you have just heard? Will the messengers who hastened here to tell you what happened at the front utter a lie? Does not solitary Lord Siva, by His very thought, destroy all the worlds in the end, in a fraction of a second? Have we not heard from the Védas that the unique Lord creates boundless worlds, protects them and finally destroys them through His will? *Can the words of Vibheeshana, that Rāma who has appeared here is the Supreme Lord Tirumāl, become false? Can true might be curbed?* We have seen fire consuming everything edible and inedible and all living objects. We have also seen the mighty storm destroying many lives, trees, rocks, grass and everything else. It is true that the wealth of Devendra did belong to you once. It is also true that the wealth has now evaporated. There is nothing that you can do to save yourself. Because of you, all your kith and kin have been destroyed." Rāvana became furious. He said, "I threw a vél at Lakshmana and presented his life to Yama. Watching this, all the commanders of the army of monkeys became grief-stricken. When Rāma sees him, he will not wish to live any longer. The destruction of the Moolabala padai does not cause me concern. Victory is anyhow on my side." The messengers added, "Even before Hanuman's medicinal herbs touched the body of Lakshmana, he regained his life. All the vānara commanders surrounded the lotus-eyed Lakshmana and embraced him. You can go and see this for yourself."

Rāvana could not believe that the entire army of Rākshasās was destroyed. He wanted to clear his confused mind and climbed the tower. When he saw that his teeming army was indeed annihilated he became sad. The sharp eyes of the slain Rākshasās' wives had become red as they held their heads in their hands and wept bitterly. Rāvana heard their wail. Rivers of fresh blood carried countless corpses of elephants in their flow and went below the water level to the bottom of the earth, knocking down mountains en route. Hordes of demons were drowned in those rivers of blood. *Rāvana, with tears welling up in his smouldering eyes, saw the flood of blood gushing out from the mouths of Rākshasās slain by Rāma's arrows which were as bountiful as the language of Tamil!* Rāvana saw hordes of Rākshasis, unable to bear the sight of demons digging out flesh from the wounds of their mighty-shouldered dead husbands, gouging their own eyes with their sharp nails and swords. Rāvana also saw the monkeys shaking and shattering the sky with the clamour they raised, the cluster of Rākshasa bodies dancing violently, tearing the earth and plunging into the abyss, and the jubilation of the gazing Devas! After seeing all this, Rāvana was heart-broken and came down from the tower. Laughing with fury, his nostrils puffing smoke, his

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tongues licking the inside of his mouths and his head full of arrogance, Rāvana, uttering words which could arouse fire, reached his throne in a great rage!

34. RĀVANA BOARDS HIS CHARIOT

Addressing the mountain-like Mahōdaran with smoky eyebrows, Rāvana said, "Make an announcement by the beat of drums that all the imperishable armies in the city of Lanka must rally for battle." On hearing the announcement, crores of armies of victorious wild Rākshasās came together. Sturdy chariots flying flags, elephants capable of encircling the enemies with their trunks and horses and warriors of the cavalry assembled, and made the city of Lanka look like a dry sea. Rāvana offered worship to the three-eyed Lord Siva and gave away countless gifts. Preparing himself to carry on his tireless fight, Rāvana wore a lustrous, golden suit of armour which was created in a yāga by Lord Brahma for Devendra, who in turn had presented it to his vanquisher, Indrajit. Tucking his shining sword into his waist-band, Rāvana tied a golden quiver to his back with a rope that resembled the serpent, Vāsuki. His waist-band set with several types of gems, looked like an assembly of moving planets. Dressed in a dhoti with several folds, resembling the spread of the Védas and the spread of Garuda's feathers, Rāvana held it in place with a white-toothed snake, which looked like the crescent moon. Over his hip, he tied a chain, set with gems flashing like streaks of lightning simultaneously appearing from a cluster of thunderous dark clouds. He adorned his feet with golden, flower-shaped anklets which flashed (like lightning) and roared like lions. Celestials and mortals alike were struck with fear like snakes frightened by the sound of thunder! Like serpents entwined round palmyrah trees, epaulettes were seen on all his twenty arms. The gloves on his hands looked like the indelible stain of venom on the neck of the serpent, Anantan. He wore oscillating hoops over his sturdy shoulders which were as strong as the serpent Vāsuki. *Rāvana's ears were adorned with rings which shone like the golden rays of the sun. The ornaments which he wore on all his twenty shoulders which were smeared with the paste of kunkumam, shed bright light like the sun, removing darkness.* He wore pearls resembling the stars and the full moon. Like several suns with hot rays rising together from the sea at dawn, lustrous umbrellas set with pearls were spread over his ten heads. The curved teeth protruding from the depths of his cavernous mouths, looked like the crescent moon appearing on the third day of the new moon in the red sky with moist blue clouds. The heroes' face-plates with lustrous pearls, shining brightly on his ten foreheads, resembled the face-plates of herds of rutting elephants coming together to attack the enemy. *Rāvana's heads would bow only to his beloved consorts' beautiful*

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feet adorned with tinkling anklets, never to anyone else! The lustre from the gem-set crowns adorning these heads, removed darkness from countless worlds and chased away the sun who showered light only on one world! Rāvana wore the garland presented to him after his victory over the Nāgas, the lunar world and the world of Lord Brahma. He also wore the tumbai garland. *The supply of arrows in his quiver was as infinite as eternity, the sand in the sea-bed, the fishes in the sea, the stars in the sky, and the greatness of learning.* The quiver tied to the back of his shoulders contained indestructible arrows that would outlast even the five stable and lofty elements!

After Rāvana donned his war-attire, a chariot was brought at his command. This chariot, capable of bearing everyone from the celestial and Nāga worlds as lightly as a flower worn on a tuft, could reach the desired destination in a flash. Drawn by a thousand horses of the same stock as Soorya's galloping green horses and those which had come from the ocean of milk, the chariot could move in the sky as it did on the earth, could go over fire as it moved on water, could move in the battlefield as well as in the golden city of Brahma and could move to any world in an instant. It was provided with crores of jingling bells resembling the ones worn by the regional elephants. Set with a cluster of gems, which could buy the world, the chariot shed such lustre that it resembled the Meru covered with several discs of the sun! Rāvana's chariot carried weapons which were presented by the sages, the Devas and the Trinity of Gods, and weapons which fleeing foes had surrendered as tributes. *To an enemy, these weapons were even harsher than fate.* The Disc of Tirumāl or the Trident of Siva or the sacred jug of Brahma might perish, but not this sturdy chariot, which was as powerful as truth and an abode of victory, and whose competence was beyond the comprehension of even the Devas! After chanting incantations and worshipping the outstanding chariot, Rāvana gave away innumerable gifts to countless learned persons, paid obeisance to the chariot and boarded it. On seeing this, Devendra and others became concerned. Even the sages who controlled their five senses, feared for the world.

Rāvana declared, "My fight today with my foes will either plunge beautiful Seeta into a sea of agony and make her beat her belly with her flower-like hands, or make Mandōdhari experience the same agonising despair." His many heads adorned with crowns and his several hands holding countless gleaming weapons, Rāvana stood mightily like Lord Tirumāl who stunned the terrestrial and the celestial worlds when

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He was about to measure them. Slapping his shoulders, Rāvana raised a clamour that rent the sky in two, shattered the Kula mountain, gashed the earth, made the sun stand like a fine golden pot deviating from his usual orbit, and made the moon shed nectar! Realising that the fierce war was drawing near, ecstatic Rāvana twanged his bow so violently that the sound pulverized huge mountains. Frightened by this thunderous sound, Deva and Dānava women held their māngalyams anxiously. All living beings shivered and took to their heels. The spectacular Rāvana conjured up visions of Ādisesha, the serpent-king, spreading his several hoods with their lustrous, precious Nāgaratnam. His eyes shot flames of fire which were twice as hot as the pralaya submarine fire. He looked as if he were triumphantly standing after spilling blood by killing the Devas, the Asuras and others in the three worlds. The disturbed state of the three worlds, the trembling of the celestials, the rocking and rolling of mountain, sky and land, and the ebbing of the waves of the sea out of fear, were seen by Sugreeva and the other mighty vānara heroes. Not knowing what had caused all this, they were troubled because the loud sound that they heard and the loss of identity of several objects in the world were signs that appeared only before pralaya. After some time, however, they realised that the clamour was caused by the arrival of Rāvana's chariot and the fierce army of Rākshasās which resembled a sea, a cluster of mountains, lofty clouds moving in the sky. Vibheeshana rushed to Rāma and told him, "O Victorious king! Rāvana has come with his army ready for war. The front line of his army has now come forward and our frightened vānaras are trembling. The Devas have run away in fear."

35. RĀMA BOARDS THE CHARIOT

Raising a clamour, the demoralised monkeys with folded hands fell stammering, at Rāma's feet. Rāma rose instantly, as he had once risen from the serpent-bed to reassure the frightened Devas. Resembling a mighty elephant, he took up a deadly sword which looked like Yama's unique noose and declared, "Today is the day for removing the agony of the young creeper-like Seeta and the sufferings of the celestials." The armour that protected and contained Rāma (Tirumāl) could as well be called Tirumāl Himself who keeps within Him the entire world! Rāma covered his flower-like hands (the divine 'kitchen' of Yama who was aggrieved due to lack of 'food') with gloves, and tied his quiver containing as many arrows as the countless objects in the world to his back.

Addressing the Devas, Lord Siva observed, "The war will end today. Victory is assured for the courageous Rāma. Cast away your fear. Please arrange for a decorated,

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gem-studded, golden chariot with mighty and swift horses for Rāma." The Devas conveyed Lord Siva's wishes to Devendra who called the divine charioteer, Mātali, and told him, "Bring my unique chariot which can protect the three worlds simultaneously ." *Mātali immediately brought the golden chariot which looked like the all-pervading world surrounded by the omnipresent sea.* The chariot which appeared as if its base was formed by the lunar world, was so lofty that it touched the sky. The chariot which was as mighty as the seven Kula hills, was tightly bound with eight hissing serpents and had sturdy wheels and strong axles. *Details of journeys performed, the year, season, month, date and period-wise programmes, were documented and kept in its beautiful upper deck.* Adorned with a chain, set with gems which twinkled like stars, it was as strong as a mountain. A cluster of moist clouds was seen over the flag flying on the chariot which had the combined strength of all the five elements. *The chariot had plants and all medicinal herbs arranged in an orderly manner within it.* It roared past so loudly that the sound resembled the pralaya clamour of the tidal sea full of conches. The 'bud' of the chariot looked like the lotus bud from which Lord Brahma hailed. The chariot was as wide as the serpent-bed of Lord Tirumāl who could contain everything within His belly. *The four unique Védas, properly performed yāgas, the seven different seas, the seven worlds, the five elements, the three kinds of fire, truthful penance, the sacrificial havis, the five senses and sense organs, the four directions, the ten wandering winds, the long daytime and the extended night, acted as the 'steeds' of this exquisite chariot!*

The Devas paid homage to the chariot with flowers and said, "O mighty god! You have come here directed by Devendra. Do help us to secure victory in this war." Thereafter, Mātali drove the chariot towards Rāma. Traversing a long distance and worshipped by the celestials as well as the denizens of other worlds, the chariot came out of the sky moving with the speed of mind, reached the earth, and stood before the blemishless Rāma. Looking at the chariot, Rāma wondered, "This is not the sun's chariot, which is single-wheeled. Nor does it look like the bright light of the submarine fire arising at the time of the dissolution of the universe. It cannot be the unshakeable Meru because this chariot is loftier; nor can it be the unique flying chariot of the Trinity of Gods. Why has it come here?" *Rāma asked Mātali, "On whose orders have you brought this chariot here?" Mātali told Rāma, "Dear father, this chariot was created by Lord Siva and the four-headed Lord Brahma long ago. It will remain intact, even after the dissolution of the universe. Belonging to Devendra, it can contain and carry all the worlds like the belly of Lord Tirumāl! It can shrink or expand at will. It is capable of*

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moving as fast as your arrows, and faster than even the sight of the eye and the speed of the mind and the wild wind. Transcending the sensations of living beings, it operates without any distinction between the sky, the earth, the sea and fire! O creator of this world! Except this chariot, there is nothing in this universe that is constant and perennial, not even the seven oceans and fourteen worlds which are bound to be destroyed by Time. O Supreme Lord! This chariot has been sent by Devendra at the behest of Lord Siva and the exalted sages and Lord Brahma."

Listening to Mātali, Rāma at first wondered whether the chariot was an illusion created by the inimical Rākshasās. But the mighty, handsome horses drawing it, appeared to indicate through the Védic language that what Mātali said was true. Shedding his misgivings, Rāma asked the charioteer what his name was. Replying that he was known as Mātali, he worshipped Rāma with sincerity. Looking at the great Hanuman and the leonine Lakshmana, Rāma asked them what they thought. Both of them said that the chariot belonged to Devendra. The incarnation of Rāma had caused sin to lose its strength and roll down crestfallen, and encouraged punyam to become jubilant. The Devas, sages and others, who were sorrowful hitherto, offered their salutations to Rāma with folded hands. Rāma then happily boarded the chariot.

36. THE SLAYING OF RĀVANA

When the heroic Rāma boarded the beautiful, broad chariot, its lustrous wheels pressed the earth hard. Looking at this, the Devas extolled it by comparing it to the sturdy shoulders of Hanuman, and not to the fierce Garuda! Showering it with flowers, they raised a joyous clamour and said, "Let this chariot possess the might of all of us and proceed now! Let Rāvana, the great master of warfare, go to the front and die today! May the king of kings, Rāma, be victorious! May the Rākshasis weep bitterly!" The sturdy chariot proceeded towards the battlefield as though it had plunged into dust and was coming out of it. On seeing the chariot, Rāvana knew that it had been given by the Devas. In great fury, he bit his lips and gnashed his teeth. Brushing aside his thoughts, he told his charioteer, "Take my sturdy chariot towards Rāma of robust hands and lustrous bow." The scattered vānaras shed their fear on learning that the Devas had provided a chariot for Rāma, the vanquisher of enemies, and that he would undoubtedly win. They began moving everywhere hurling trees and rocks at the enemies. Their clamour made one wonder whether the eight regions and the world had changed places. The mighty booming of the leather drums, the clamour of the heroes, the uproarious jubilation of the armies filling the battleground

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and the rumble of Rāma's rolling chariot deafened everyone standing near by, and made them fall down.

Seeing Rāvana coming towards him, Rāma looked at Mātali and said, "Dear one! Only after watching what the arrogant, inimical, battle-hungry Rāvana does, should you drive the chariot as I guide you. For the present do not do anything in haste." *Mātali replied, "It will be an affront to my knowledge of charioteering, if I am not aware of your thinking, the mind of the enemies, their great strength and the consequent harm, the steadfastness of the enemy army and our army, the nature of the season and the firmness of our objectives."* Mahōdaran, in the mean time told Rāvana, "O lord, Rāma approaches in Devendra's horse-drawn chariot. Both of you are involved in a fierce war. It would be a crime on my part to remain an idle spectator. Please permit me to participate in the battle." Rāvana replied, "I will destroy this lotus-eyed Rāma like a lion destroys an elephant. If you can prevent Lakshmana, who is closely following his brother, from entering the war, that by itself would be a victory you would be offering me." Mahōdaran agreed and left. But even before he could proceed towards Lakshmana, heroic Rāma's mighty, divine chariot came towards him. Annoyed by this, Mahōdaran directed his charioteer to dash his chariot against Rāma's. The charioteer replied respectfully, "O lord! When I look at great Rāma, I am inclined to believe that not one but crores of fierce-eyed Rāvanas will only lose their lives and die if they go anywhere near him today. They can never return victorious. You had better avoid him and proceed in a different direction." Mahōdaran became furious. He gnashed his curved teeth and said, "I have refrained from eating you, only for fear of the disgrace I would bring on myself." The next moment, Rāma's sturdy chariot stood in front of rock-like Mahōdaran's long chariot.

As if he were scattering seeds, Mahōdaran showered arrows on the victorious flag of Devendra's divine chariot, on Mātali the charioteer, and on the shoulders of the victorious Rāma. Mahōdaran also raised a furore which rent the sky and the eight directions. Watching all this, Rāma simply smiled. With an arrow each, Rāma got rid of Mahōdaran's bow, armour, hands, rock-like shoulders and neck. *Thus, belying his words, an altogether different fate overtook Mahōdaran and he fell, dead.* Witnessing Mahōdaran being cut into pieces and his consequent death, the mighty Rāvana, conqueror of the three worlds, directed his chariot towards Rāma. Realising that as long as Rāvana was surrounded by a vast army he would not lose his enthusiasam, Rāma annihilated the army. Several evil omens were noticed by Rāvana. His ten left shoulders adorned with epaulettes set with

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lustrous gems, throbbed. The raging sea went dry and mountain ranges trembled, and wild pralaya winds blew. There was an incessant shower of blood in all the worlds. Wild thunder came out of the clouds, struck the mountains and reduced them to dust. The fading sun merged with its halo. The galloping horses of Rāvana's chariot became inactive and slept. The strings of his bow gave way. The fresh flowers in his garland stank of flesh. Vultures and crows swarmed his flag. Tears flowed from the eyes of the war-horses. Wild elephants, adorned with ornate face-plates, remained subdued as if inside a shed. While these bad omens made the Devas happy, Rāvana ignored them. He was confident that he could not be vanquished by humans. His chariot rolled fast on the battleground. The armies could not withstand its speed and ran away on either side like people fleeing from floods during a deluge.

Like karma on one side and enlightenment acquired at the end of yōga on the other, like ignorance on one side and great wisdom on the other, like mighty sinful vices on one side and steadfast dharma on the other, Rāvana and Rāma opposed each other. It seemed as if the thousand-hooded serpent, Ādisesha, and the mighty, divine Garuda were facing one another. While Rāvana resembled the night, Rāma resembled the day. Like victorious handsome regional elephants standing furiously before each other, they confronted one another. Rāma and Rāvana looked like Lord Narasimhamurti and Hiranyan engaged in battle. They could be compared to Lord Tirumāl and Lord Siva trying to find out — prompted by the Devas — whose bow was superior! Lord Siva and Lord Brahma, witnessing the fierce battle between Rāma and Rāvana from the sky, found their hands trembling. Rāvana blew the conch which, during his earlier visits to the eight regions, used to silence the exultant Devas. Though they were still afraid of that sound, they were pleasantly surprised when they suddenly heard the self-generated blare of Lord Tirumāl's divine white Conch, 'Pāncajanyam'. The five weapons of Tirumāl, the Disc, the Conch, the Club, the Sword, and the Kōdandam were waiting on earth to serve Lord Rāma! *Just as the scriptures could not comprehend the truthful Rāma, Rāma did not see these weapons though he was the true substance of all the celestials.* Destabilising the world, the divine charioteer Mātali blew Devendra's conch making the eight regions, the sky, the tidal sea, the earth, the mountains and the exalted Devas, tremble with fear.

The cruel, red-eyed horses drawing the chariots of Rāma and Rāvana, arrived at the front. They began prancing impatiently, looking furiously at one another and flashing sparks of fire as if they were about to devour one another. The veena on Rāvana's flag

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and the great thunder on Rāma's, raised such a roar that it seemed as though the earth, the sky, and the seas would perish. The twang of fierce, red-eyed Rāvana's bow was like the roar of the seven seas, while that of Rāma's bow was like the thunder produced by the clouds which rend the sky at the time of pralaya. On hearing these sounds, Hanuman and the furious vānara warriors became depressed and lost their composure. They forgot their duties and fell on the ground. The Devas, unable to forsee what was going to happen in the war, stood sobbing, oblivious of their tasks and moved hither and thither with their minds agitated and disturbed. When they saw Rāma's mighty arms grow in size, and his fingers press tightly against his gloves, the Devas became happy and, wondering who could match his valour, showered a rain of flowers on him! *Rāma's bow with which he ruled all the worlds and Rāvana's bow which none in the world could handle, looked like rainbows strung with lightning, facing each other in the sky.* The roar of the sea and the clamour of the clouds, heard today could well be the reverberations of the blare of Rāvana's conch, his haughty laughter, and the twang of the bow on that fateful day of the battle! Even the thunderbolts from the sky appearing on the earth could only be sparks of fire from the furious eyes of Rāvana, hitting the sky and falling down! Whenever Rāvana laughed in great rage, the four directions were perturbed, the tongues of the Devas fumbled, their legs trembled, the moist clouds shuddered and the Trikoota mountain shook. Flashes of light, emanating from the weapons swung by Rāvana, pervaded all the regions.

Rāvana declared, "It would be beneath my dignity to kill this weak young man who has a bow in his hand. I will catch him with his celestial chariot, hurl him skywards and dash him against the earth. This young man is too feeble to take on my thunder-like fierce arrows. Anyway, I do not need them to kill him. I will demolish his might with my bare hands, destroy his chariot and capture him along with his bow." But, fickle of mind, Rāvana, with fiery rage and burning eyes, bent his mountainous bow and shot fierce arrows which could harm the world and pierce Yama's chest. Capable of destroying the darts of even the Devas, they were bigger in size than the big serpent, Vāsuki! *Rāma, the ocean of mercy, shot arrows from his mighty golden bow, intercepted all the arrows, and made them ineffective like the efforts of a cruel leader set at naught by his sins!* Still, the cruel Rāvana shot a series of rain-like fierce arrows resembling a cluster of dark pralaya clouds. Looking at the volume of arrows, Lord Siva was aghast and commented, "These arrows have completely screened the sky, the regions, the mountains, the eyes of the celestials, the sea, the earth, the

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thoughts of scholars, fire and even darkness. I wonder where this war will lead to." The Devas, sages and others, were stunned. They covered their eyes with their hands and changed their positions. *The army of vānaras was scattered like a mountain reduced to dust by a thousand thunderbolts!*

Rāma shot fierce and sharp arrows to intercept Rāvana's arrows. *While these were as effective as the virtuous act of feeding a pious sage during famine, an act which earns the philanthropist punyam, Rāvana's arrows perished like the effect of a chain of sinful deeds!* A hero of boundless might, Rāvana would shoot a hundred thousand sharp, fierce arrows at a time. They would all be cut into pieces by the unique Rāma. The pieces would emit fire, suck sea water, turn into mire, then dust, and finally end up as high ground. Against Rāma's arrows, Rāvana's long arms hurled weapons like curved clubs, tridents, missiles, pestles, conches, discs and véls. Rāma gave a fitting reply, with a variety of fast arrows simulating wind, fire and thunder. Just one of them, was enough to destroy thousands of Rāvana's weapons. Both Rāma and Rāvana were fighting with equal merit. Rāvana was as furious as an elephant prodded by a mighty goad. He took a bow in each of his ten hands, fed arrows into them and shot the arrows simultaneously like several clouds joining together and showering torrential rains. The shower of arrows shot by the two opponents, fell scattered in all places, frightening the earth as well as the five elements.

Suddenly, Rāvana's chariot rose high as if the Mandara mountain or the Sanjeevi mountain (brought by Hanuman) or the celestial Gandharva city had appeared in the sky. Rāvana showered arrows from the sky killing the monkeys en masse. Rāma, who saw the destruction of his army, told Mātali, "Youthful, bull-like warriors of our army have been killed. I will dispatch my arrows in such a manner as to sever and knock down the drum-like shoulders, crowns and heads of Rāvana." Mātali understood Rāma's mind and drove the chariot towards the sky with the speed of the pralaya wind. *Rāma's huge chariot finally went above Rāvana's, as though the sun was going round the moon!* Thereafter, the chariots went round each other. The cluster of clouds was disturbed. The mountain peaks were crushed. The two chariots swung around each other to the right, then to the left and also moved up and down, touching the sky and the earth. Then they went through the same movements in the reverse direction. They moved around the sea, mighty mountains and the universe, like a potter's wheel. They moved with great speed over all the worlds in as short a time as it would take for a black gram to roll. The Devas were unable to identify which one belonged to

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Rāma and which to Rāvana! The wheels of both the chariots attacked the roof of the sky, with the result that no star which did not drop down, no mountain which was not reduced to powder, no region which was not burnt due to the fire caused by the rubbing of the two chariots against each other, no life which did not spew blood, could be seen.

The confused Devas would say that Rāma and Rāvana were in the world of Devendra. The same Devas would again assert that the two were in the lunar world. Some Devas would say that these two were in the world of Brahma while others would claim that the chariots of Rāma and Rāvana were on the Mandara mountain. Even the knowledgeable celestials would at one moment assert that these two were in the ocean of milk and after a while say that Rāma and Rāvana were in the farthest oceans or in the western ocean. Later, they would again change their minds and say that these two were in the eastern region. Any sound that they heard, was for them the sound of the chariots. The Devas who became sorrowful, fearing the destruction of the world, wondered whether the chariots had returned to the earth from the sky or whether the sky had been torn or whether Rāma and Rāvana had come back to the earth after their fight in the celestial region or whether those who were drawing the chariots were only horses or some other strange type of wind! The horses drawing the two chariots sped to the boundaries of the shell of the earth, the seven seas, the seven islands, the seven mountains, the seven lower worlds and the seven upper worlds. In all the places traversed by them, Rāvana showered weapons from his chariot on Rāma, like drops of rain from the clouds. *The lethal weapons like vél and sharp arrows, dispatched by him, were all broken and shattered calmly and without anger by Rāma!*

The two chariots, resembling the pralaya wind, wandered over the mountains, the seas, the worlds above and the worlds below and returned to Lanka, all in a moment. Even though the number of times they went round was thrice the number of grains of sand in the ocean, the gallant horses drawing the two chariots, ably driven by the two expert charioteers did not become weary nor did they heave a sigh. The mighty flag with the emblem of thunder, standing erect on Rāma's chariot, was felled by a moon-like arrow shot by furious Rāvana. The flag hurtled into the sea, roaring like the submarine fire, and the sea water shrank like water into which a hot iron rod is immersed. Unable to kill the immortal horses drawing Rāma's chariot, Rāvana dispatched twelve of his pointed arrows at the diamond-hard chest of the charioteer, Mātali. *These arrows caused more mental agony to Rāma than the vél which had struck*

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thoughts of scholars, fire and even darkness. I wonder where this war will lead to." The Devas, sages and others, were stunned. They covered their eyes with their hands and changed their positions. *The army of vānaras was scattered like a mountain reduced to dust by a thousand thunderbolts!*

Rāma shot fierce and sharp arrows to intercept Rāvana's arrows. *While these were as effective as the virtuous act of feeding a pious sage during famine, an act which earns the philanthropist punyam, Rāvana's arrows perished like the effect of a chain of sinful deeds!* A hero of boundless might, Rāvana would shoot a hundred thousand sharp, fierce arrows at a time. They would all be cut into pieces by the unique Rāma. The pieces would emit fire, suck sea water, turn into mire, then dust, and finally end up as high ground. Against Rāma's arrows, Rāvana's long arms hurled weapons like curved clubs, tridents, missiles, pestles, conches, discs and véls. Rāma gave a fitting reply, with a variety of fast arrows simulating wind, fire and thunder. Just one of them, was enough to destroy thousands of Rāvana's weapons. Both Rāma and Rāvana were fighting with equal merit. Rāvana was as furious as an elephant prodded by a mighty goad. He took a bow in each of his ten hands, fed arrows into them and shot the arrows simultaneously like several clouds joining together and showering torrential rains. The shower of arrows shot by the two opponents, fell scattered in all places, frightening the earth as well as the five elements.

Suddenly, Rāvana's chariot rose high as if the Mandara mountain or the Sanjeevi mountain (brought by Hanuman) or the celestial Gandharva city had appeared in the sky. Rāvana showered arrows from the sky killing the monkeys en masse. Rāma, who saw the destruction of his army, told Mātali, "Youthful, bull-like warriors of our army have been killed. I will dispatch my arrows in such a manner as to sever and knock down the drum-like shoulders, crowns and heads of Rāvana." Mātali understood Rāma's mind and drove the chariot towards the sky with the speed of the pralaya wind. *Rāma's huge chariot finally went above Rāvana's, as though the sun was going round the moon!* Thereafter, the chariots went round each other. The cluster of clouds was disturbed. The mountain peaks were crushed. The two chariots swung around each other to the right, then to the left and also moved up and down, touching the sky and the earth. Then they went through the same movements in the reverse direction. They moved around the sea, mighty mountains and the universe, like a potter's wheel. They moved with great speed over all the worlds in as short a time as it would take for a black gram to roll. The Devas were unable to identify which one belonged to

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Lakshmana's beautiful chest! From his sturdy bent bow, Rāvana shot a series of scorching arrows which screened Rāma from the vision of the unblinking eyes of the Devas. As a result, the Devas became frightened, while the Rākshasās roared in jubilation. The moving wind became static. The universe was perturbed! Fire lost its natural brightness, the sea remained motionless without the waves coming up, the sun and the moon ceased to orbit and the clouds lost their rain-bearing nature! The mighty elephants guarding the eight regions stopped secreting their rutting fluid and the planet Mars moved fast and climbed over the star, Visākam, portending the ruin that awaited kings. The big Meru mountain shook. Sugreeva, Jāmbavan and Angada lamented over their inability to see Rāma and were bemused like elephants who had lost their leader in a forest. The rest of the warriors, too, suffered like the fishes in a sea, bound by a dam.

Countering Rāvana's attack and severing all his arrows, Rāma shot a series of fierce arrows and harassed him to the great relief of the celestials. *Rāma the God who was part of the lives of all mortals, shot lofty arrows which broke the centre of the mountainous bows held by Rāvana's hefty hands resembling a row of pillars.* Rāma, an image of effulgence, capable of seeing the future even in divine 'sleep', shot fiery and sharp arrows which could penetrate the armour of the foes and draw their blood. Rāvana's huge flag with the veena emblem, flying aloft and touching the clouds, was felled by Rāma with an arrow stuck with the flesh of foes. *The divine Garuda, gigantic in appearance, and raising a roar like the vast pralaya sea, came and sat on the flagstaff of Rāma's chariot, striking terror in the ranks of the Rākshasa army. The Devas felt that with the arrival of Garuda, Rāma's anger would abate. The cruel, destructive and sinful Rāvana realised that Rāma, the Supreme God perceivable through exceptional knowledge and wisdom, was not in the least harmed by his arrows!* He showered Rāma with arrows known as Tāmadam which caused darkness all around! Some of the faces of the Tāmadam would spit fire, while some others would be drenched in blood. Some of them resembled the Devas, while some others resembled demons and some looked like striped snakes entering snake holes. These arrows were big and long, encompassing the space between two regions, and could swallow the sun and the moon and carry out the objectives of the master who dispatched them. Causing darkness in one region and sunshine in another, these arrows caused hurricane in one region and rain in another region! While in one direction these arrows caused bewilderment, in another direction they brought forth a rain of stones. The seven worlds were plunged in darkness and all the beings therein cried. Everything came to a grinding halt as a result of these arrows which advanced towards Rāma!

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Impeccable Rāma, took out a deadly dart, dedicated it to Lord Siva and shot it at Rāvana's Tāmadam arrows which disappeared in a moment like a dream vanishing suddenly on waking up. Finding his widespread arrows destroyed, like a tissue of lies demolished by truth, fiery-eyed Rāvana bit his lips, selected special arrows with the feathers of eagles and shot them at Rāma. He also shot a speedy arrow known as Āsuram, which could consume the pride of the Devas, fill Yama's belly with sweet lives and baffle even Devendra. While the Devas feared for the world, Rāma shot a fiery dart dedicated to Agni and destroyed Rāvana's arrow. Rāvana again shot billions of arrows which were more fatal than Yama. These arrows were capable of siphoning off the entire sea, reducing the Meru to dust, attaining a tremendous speed and vanquishing all the worlds. Wondering at Rāvana's deft handling of the bow, some Rākshasās said, "These are only illusions and not real arrows." A few said, "Is there any further space left for the activities of these arrows?" Some others said, "Never before has Rāvana strained himself to this extent." *The unique Lord Rāma, extolled by the scriptures, shot crescent-like arrows which tore to pieces Rāvana's fierce, feathered, arrows that had screened the sky!* Rāvana who had reaped great rewards from penances, declared furiously that he had a dart (given by Mayan) which had earned fame for him in many an earlier battle, and shot it at Rāma. On seeing this, the Devas exclaimed that Rāvana would soon destroy the world. The vānaras, too, were scared that they would be annihilated. *Rāma, an incarnation of Lord Tirumāl who is worshipped by the exalted, realising the nature of this dart, destroyed it with a fierce arrow known as Gāndharbam.* Declaring that he had a mace (created by Lord Brahma long ago and used by Hiranyan to bring the worlds under his sway), Rāvana threatened to use it to draw the lives out of his enemies and hurled it at Rāma. The mace approached Rāma with the brightness of the sun, making everyone comment in grief that the world would soon be destroyed like a pot of water. The lotus-eyed Rāma smashed the divine mace into pieces with a lotus-bud-like arrow to see which, even Devendra's thousand eyes were inadequate!

Rāvana thought, "This Rāma who is to perish shortly has exhibited his prowess. There is no point in using ineffective weapons on him. I will shoot a powerful illusory dart." Worshipping the weapon, and praying to Lord Siva, Rāvana fed the arrow into his bow and shot it. Immediately, Indrajit and his brothers, other leaders and countless Rākshasās who had been killed earlier in the war, by the arrows of Rāma and Lakshmana, came back alive and raised a clamour. The dead Rākshasas like Kumbhakarna with pot-like ears, his warriors, and Rāvana's Moolabala padai, proudly rose. The dead elephants and

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the shattered chariots assembled again on the battlefield. The thousand vellam warriors who were considered dead, came alive due to the boon secured by Rāvana from Lord Siva. Challenging those who had killed them, the Rākshasa warriors shouted, "Have you defeated us? Will we ever die? Today we will exhibit our valour. Come before us." These Rākshasās then wandered on all sides frightening the sages and the Devas. Affected by the illusory dart of Rāvana, serpents like Vāsuki came out of the abyss, tearing open the earth. Mountain-like demons left for the sky and took shelter there. Noble sages who had propitiated Lord Brahma, found to their dismay the arrival of sinful Rākshasās with their gleaming weapons. Another set of Rākshasās, twice as many as the 'revived' Rākshasās, endowed with the power of sorcery and ocean-like pride, arrived on the scene. Along with the Vidyādharas, they proudly spread themselves in all the eight directions blocking all the regions with their mighty physique.

Looking at the newly-created Rākshasās, Rāma asked Mātali the charioteer, "Is sorcery responsible for all these creatures? Or is it destiny or the boons secured by the mighty Rākshasās or something else? Tell me if you know." Mātali said, "O Lord, like a fool who would try to sell a needle to a blacksmith, Rāvana has shot the illusory dart. You may in reply, after proper incantation, dispatch a suitable lethal arrow which can counter the venom of sharp-toothed serpents. *If you counter his illusory dart with your arrow which has the effect of chanting your divine name, all these deceptions will disappear like the elimination of rebirth for those who worship you!"* Rāma dispatched an arrow known as Gnānamākkanai which dispels illusion and brings enlightenment. Consequently, the illusions created by Rāvana's dart were completely removed, as the attachments caused by ignorance are removed by wisdom from an ascetic life! While the Trinity of Gods were looking forward to the slaying of the Rākshasās, Rāvana (the tormentor of the Devas) took a trident to destroy everything that he could see. Fitted with a thousand clanging bells, the trident distressed the Devas. The lustre of the trident spread all over the world and blinded those who looked at it. It was directed to weaken the minds and bodies of the Devas, who, out of fright, went to Rāma and beseeched him to vanquish that Yama-like weapon as he alone had the prowess to do so. *But Rāma's fast and powerful arrows became powerless, and fell scattered like the ineffective harm inflicted by atheists on pious people.* Rāma, the creator of the world, shot several arrows one after the other. *They all burned up like cotton before fire and went up in smoke like a tissue of lies before truth!* Rāma stood unable to control that trident which appeared as infallible as the curse of a sage. *The goddess of dharma*

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shuddered! The Devas wondered if Rāma had forgotton his task. Rāma, who had taken birth as a man without anyone knowing it, stood facing the trident while others were aghast. Spitting fire, the clanging trident reached the graceful chest of Rāma with the object of killing him, but a mere snort of anger and contempt from him, shattered it!

The Devas felt as if they had regained their lost lives. Casting away their fear, they roared in jubilation and danced ecstatically. Showering flowers all over the world, they worshipped Rāma and appealed to him to remove future hardships, too. Rāvana had been confident that his trident would not leave Rāma without killing him. But, when by a mere snort of his, the trident had perished, Rāvana was surprised. Baffled by Rāma's easy victory and recollecting Vibheeshana's earlier observations, Rāvana thought, "Rāma has destroyed all my boons. He cannot be the Trinity of Gods or a great sage who has done exceptional penance. For, none of them is capable of these unique feats. *Is he then the Supreme Lord who is the origin of the Védas?* Whoever he be, I will not give up my valour. If the valiant Rāma fights with me face to face and succeeds in killing me, I will only attain name and fame. Nobility and heroism will not desert me." Rāvana regained his fortitude. Invoking the deity guarding the south-west region, he instantly secured a weapon in his mighty hand and fed it into his bow which had the prowess of demolishing Yama's pride! As Rāvana shot the dart, several serpents with crores of hoods and countless bodies and mouths appeared. Each serpent's mouth spat a flood of venom, sent forth a fire which engulfed the whole sky and exhibited fierce, white, demons' teeth. All living beings feared that these serpents would bite Rāma and consume the world along with the sea. Seeing the mighty serpents gulping huge mountains with their mouths, Rāma shot the Garudāstram which unfailingly attacked the serpents. The victorious eagles that flew from the Garudāstram, had fast wings, golden beaks and claws. *Wherever they went, they chased all the serpents, transforming the whole world into one full of eagles, and serpents.* The countless eagles fighting the serpents, was a splendid spectacle! The lustrous gems on the heads of the serpents glowed like a smouldering fire. They looked like torches being held to burn the city of Lanka. The eagles picked the serpents up with their beaks as if they were plucking lotuses along with their stalks, carried them in their claws and then ate them.

Rāvana became extremely furious. With a raging heart, he heaved a deep sigh exhaling sparks of fire and shot thunder-like arrows which filled up the earth and the sky. These scorching arrows were countered by Rāma's arrows and were forced to

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return and pierce the chest of Rāvana himself. While the two adversaries were fighting, the sturdy-shouldered Rāvana, who had once lifted Mount Kailas, began to forget the nuances of warfare he had learnt. On the other hand, Rāma's prowess and valour increased considerably. *Rāma, the true substance and the origin of the Védas, chose an appropriate time and an appropriate arrow, shaped like the crescent moon, and brought to the ground the best head among the ten heads of Rāvana, the king of Rākshasās!* Like the Meru-peak (broken by Vāyu), one of the sturdy heads of Rāvana fell into the sea. Seeing this, the jubilant celestials jumped down, extolled Rāma and pounded the earth. But the severed head of Rāvana reappeared with great fury, as if instantly coming back alive after death proving the greatness of his penance. Rāvana's head reunited with his body as though it had never been severed. It abused the great Rāma and blustered like thunder, with its eyes emitting venom. *Furious that he had severed one of his heads, Rāvana thundered and aimed fourteen arrows at the shoulders of Rāma, the Supreme Lord, construed as the beginning of the universe like the very first Tamil letter 'Agaram'.* Realising that Rāvana had acquired the boon of getting back his severed heads, Rāma shot a crescent arrow, sundered Rāvana's hand which held the bow and dispatched it to the ground. While the severed hand of Rāvana did not lose its grip on the bow, a new hand holding a bow instantly replaced it unobserved by anyone!

To destroy the prowess of Mātali who was driving the chariot with a golden cord, Rāvana picked up the heavy severed hand which still held the bow, and hit the chest of the mighty charioteer. Mātali lost his nerve, and spewed up blood. Rāvana who had sung the tune of 'Kāmaram' before Lord Siva and secured from Him a sharp sword, threw a Tōmaram (iron pestle) at Mātali who was already in agony. Everyone feared that Mātali would die that day. But Rāma the great archer, shot a five-faced arrow, and pulverized the fast-moving fire-flashing hot pestle that approached Mātali. The incomprehensible Rāma incessantly shot a thousand arrows and severed several heads of Rāvana. Every time a head was severed and thrown afar, it reappeared. This went on a hundred times. The heads of Rāvana, severed by Rāma's arrows fell scattered on the waves of the sea, on the four types of land, on the great big mountains and on all visible thunderous regions. The severed heads of Rāvana broke big mountains and came down. They attacked the stars in the sky. The heads which fell into the sea consumed the entire water, making it impossible for the fishes to stay alive!

The demons who once used to worship Rāvana now turned against him and began digging into the eyes of his fallen heads. This was like the decline of one's fame after

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the ebbing away of one's virtues. The mighty Rāvana hurled several fast and thunderous weapons like swords, spears, pestles, thunder-bolts, clubs and tridents at Rāma. Furious Rāma decided to fill the body of this nocturnal wanderer with arrows. Treating Rāvana as a quiver for lodging them, Rāma shot countless arrows at his mighty chest, shoulders, venomous eyes and tongues. Rāma's arrows filled Rāvaṇa's mouths and disappeared into his eyes. Piercing his chest and his body, without allowing the blood to flow out, these arrows spread everywhere. They entered Rāvana's pores, and passed through his body, trying to take away his life. Rāvana's anger and venom remained unabated while his strength began to ebb. The mighty Rāvana who used to parade through the celestial cities, now became like a shoal of fish coming out of the sea only to die. Rāvana was dejected and exhausted. He rested on his chariot with blood oozing from his body. The Devas who saw this rose and danced jubilantly, whereas, vices (finding no place to enter) fell! *Fearing that Rāvana had lost his fighting prowess, his charioteer reversed the direction of the golden chariot.* Rāma saw Rāvana dispossessed of his weapons and falling unconscious. *Respecting the scruples of warfare, he stopped shooting arrows at him.* Mātali, the charioteer, told Rāma, "Kill Rāvana while he lies exhausted. Once he recovers, it will be hard to vanquish him." Disagreeing with Mātali, the heroic Rāma said, "Having lost all his weapons, he is on the verge of swooning. He has already undergone a great deal of suffering in the battle. After seeing this, is it proper to take away his life? My mind spurns such warfare." *Among those frightened Rākshasās seated in Rāvana's chariot, there was not one who did not worship Rāma on that day for his noble act.*

To the chagrin of the Devas, the deceitful Rāvana regained consciousness and rose as if he was waking up from a deep sleep. Unable to see Rāma in front of him, Rāvana looked behind and saw him there. He became angry and told his charioteer, "In the presence of the Devas, you drove back the chariot and made Rāma scoff at me. You have erred. I had made the world recognise you by making you my charioteer, and conferring great wealth on you. What have you done to me, in return? You have made others accuse me of cowardice. Do you think you can escape my wrath?" Roaring with great fury, Rāvana raised his sword to kill his charioteer. Prostrating himself at Rāvana's feet, the charioteer said, "Please listen to me patiently and cast away your anger which has the fury of the pralaya fire. While you fought intensely with great fortitude, you became exhausted and lost your prowess. Had I hesitated even for a moment, your life would have been extinguished. I thought it wise and also my duty to retreat and mitigate your sufferings. This is true. It is the duty of a

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charioteer to consider deeply the tired state of his leader and retrieve him from imminent death at the hands of the enemy. It is therefore not proper on your part to kill me." Acceding mercifully to his charioteer's request, Rāvana said, "Take my victorious chariot before Rāma."

Rāvana shot crores of arrows which were more frightful than Yama. Acquiring thrice his original strength, he made everyone wonder whether he was some other Rākshasa. Holding a fierce sword, he fought furiously. Rāma thought, "If there is light, there will be fire, too. As long as Rāvana has his bow, he will be unbeatably strong." So he shot a thunderous arrow known as Nārāyanastram, dedicated to Lord Tirumāl, and broke Rāvana's dreadful, long divine bow in two. Seeing Rāvana's bow (presented by Brahma) fall apart, the celestials observed, "We have attained the benefits of our penance," and went into ecstasies. After his bow was broken, Rāvana continuously took up thousands of bows one after another. Rāma replied with fierce arrows which pulverised all the bows and scattered the dust in different regions. *Rāvana, who had a strong chest which had broken the tusks of the regional elephants, now tried to force Seeta out of Rāma's bosom by hurling weapons like the pestle, long club, vél, spear, sword and a scorching caltrop at it!* All these were cut into pieces by Rāma's arrows, and dumped into the wide sea. However, Rāvana could not be vanquished. Rāma thought, *"Even though countless arrows, more numerous than the grains of sand, have pierced Rāvana's eyeballs, and arrows sharper than the thoughts of scholars have penetrated his wounds, he is still not dead."* He finally took the fierce and great dart dedicated to the four-faced Lord Brahma. This Brahmāstram had been created to burn the three regions. Rāma, a descendant of the Solar dynasty and an incarnation of Lord Tirumāl, held this sharp fierce four-faced dart which was faster than wind and fire and, invoking Lord Brahma, released it after pulling the string upto his Mandara mountain like shoulders! It proceeded towards Rāvana the target. Its hot sparks could make even the bright pralaya sun appear like a glow-worm. The brightness of this Brahmāstram dispelled the darkness beyond even the Cakravala mountain.

The Brahmāstram, along with the Cakra (Disc) of the valiant Rāma entered Rāvana's chest making the earth, the eight regions and the sky spin. The unerring arrow penetrated his body and drew his life out. The divine dart thereby ate away Rāvana's life-span of three crore days, his glorious outstanding penances performed with great effort, the boons of invincibility received by him from Lord Brahma and the extraordinary might of his shoulders which had won the entire world for him in earlier wars. The jubilant

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Devas and sages showered a rain of flowers on that divine dart which bathed in the ocean of milk, crossed the sea of blood from the body of Rāvana, who owned a mountain-like chariot, and finally returned to the quiver of Rāma who resembled a dark mountain. Like thunder from dark clouds, Rāvana's ornaments and gems fell scattered from the 'forest' of his sturdy shoulders, and the 'mountain' of his (garlanded) chest. His eyes sparked and shed raging blood mixed with fiery smoke. The mighty Rāvana, resembling a mountain peak, fell from his chariot onto the earth with his furious faces touching the ground. *With the abating of his fierce leonine anger, with a mind bereft of all evil thoughts, with his fierce long arms stilled, with the disappearance of his prowess and his lust for Seeta, the ten faces of dead Rāvana who had departed from the path of dharma, shone thrice as brightly as his live faces which used to subdue even sages who had subdued their five senses!*

Directed by Rāma, Mātali drove the golden chariot down from the sky. Rāma, looked intently at the body of Rāvana from which profuse blood was spurting touching the roof of the sky. He asked Mātali to take the chariot back to the celestial world. Gazing at Rāvana's body, Rāma was pleased that he had fought without retreating and had gallantly died in the battlefield. *After his fall, countless vānaras leapt on Rāvana's heads, shoulders and back, and jumped and danced on them as if they were mountain–peaks, making everyone realise the futility of wealth which treated the high and the low alike and disappeared like an ornamental design drawn on water!* Fragrant flowers swarming with bees, circular pendants and unique ornaments with exquisite workmanship were seen on Rāvana's body. *Scars of wounds caused by the tusks of mighty elephants were visible on his back.* Rāma saw Rāvana lying dead on the ground like the crescent moon resting after ploughing through seven different types of clouds. Thinking of tender Seeta, Rāma was angry. Looking at Rāvana's wounds and the red scars on his back, Rāma's lotus-eyed face turned red. *He scornfully told Vibheeshana, "The scars on the back of Rāvana prove that he had been attacked while retreating. I have therefore brought disgrace on myself. The handsome compliments paid to my arms because I killed Rāvana (who had conquered the three worlds), were misplaced ones.* It shames me that, apart from his humiliation at Mount Kailas, and being defeated and bound by Kārtaveeryan, my opponent was also merely one who had been wounded on his back. It is a pity I have had to see the wounds on his back. Without attaining glory, I live to consume delicious food. I have made myself the laughing-stock of my enemies, with my honour gone! I have only achieved a sham

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victory over one who had run away from his foes!"

The merciful Vibheeshana was distressed. Shedding tears, with a long sigh, he said, "O Supreme Lord! Please do not utter words which are unpleasant. The victories achieved by the thousand-shouldered Kārtaveeryan and Vāli were due to the curses of the Devas. Whereas the victory achieved by you now is of a different nature. No other force except Rāvana's lust for Seeta the worshipful mother, and your wrath, could have defeated Rāvana! Eager to find his match in combat, Rāvana searched the entire world and failed in his attempt. Only then did he seek a fight with the mountain-like elephants guarding the eight regions. The long tusks of these elephants pierced his chest and reached his back. In fact all the tusks of these mighty elephants remained embedded in his bosom as ornaments. On the first day of the war, he fought a close battle with Hanuman. A forceful blow (more effective than your sturdy fast arrows) that he received on his chest from Hanuman, pushed those tusks out of his back and left scars there. Fierce venom may devour Lord Siva, venomous cobras may approach Garuda who is their deadly enemy, but the deadliest weapons of the three worlds dare not go near Rāvana. Lord Tirumāl and other celestials cannot believe that he has been killed. They are still afraid to come out into the open! *My Lord, there cannot be a more resounding victory than the one you have achieved over Rāvana."*

The heroic Rāma was rid of his misgivings and sense of shame. Looking at his own shoulders with pride, he told Vibheeshana, "Is it proper to show enmity towards one who is dead? Please perform Rāvana's last rites." Thereafter, charitable Rāma went on to receive the jubilant people of the earth, the celestials and others who had come to prostrate themselves at his feet. Rāma again told Vibheeshana, "Now that Rāvana is dead, his despicable act of tearing Seeta from me, requires to be borne patiently. As you are alive, you must perform the last rites in the prescribed form, in a fitting manner." After listening to the merciful words of Rāma, Vibheeshana suffered great mental agony and fell on Rāvana's body, like a mountain falling on another. The flawless and patient Vibheeshana wept aloud giving vent to his grief and yearning for Rāvana; emotions he had till then restrained. Vibheeshana's wail made all living beings, even the celestials and the sages who were once furious with Rāvana, now take pity on him.

Vibheeshana wept aloud and said, "O dear brother of boundless prowess! You were like pralaya in destroying the Asuras! You were Yama for the Devas. *A venom does not take the lives of those who do not consume it! But Seeta, the deadly venom, snatched*

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away your life when you merely looked at her! Great and reputed warrior that you were, you lost your life in the battlefield like an ordinary one. I was never respected by you. I had told you, after deep thought, that it was the Supreme Lord who had taken the form of Rāma. Do you now realise the truth of what I said then? I advised you to give up your lust for Seeta, a noble lady who loved (more than her life) only Rāma, and none else. I warned you that it was a sin to yearn for another's wife. You frowned on me with anger. Have you now got over your anger? Has your great lust for women ceased after the destruction of your entire race in a war? You who could scare away the regional elephants by merely raising your eyebrows! I told you that Seeta was the mother of the earth and none other than Védavati who ended her life by falling into fire. You did not listen to me. Instead of making peace with Rāma, you saw all your kith and kin senselessly dying in a furious war and lost your life, too. At least now do you realise the might of Rāma's shoulders? The several boons you secured from Lord Brahma and Lord Siva have all been shattered along with your crowns. Though you did not agree with me when I told you 'Rāma is the universal God', do you realise it at least to-day? Brother! Have you now reached the heroes' heaven or the great world of your grandfather Lord Brahma? Or, have you gone to the world of Lord Siva? Tell me, who had the audacity to snatch your life when even Yama was afraid of you. Has Manmatha stopped his mighty dance? Does the moon appear cool now? Has Soorpanakha wreaked her revenge on you because you killed her husband*? The good in heaven, as well as the sinners in hell, have all become our enemies. Friendless as you are, whom will you now face? *O foolish Rāvana! You had once embraced the goddess of wealth, the goddess of learning, and the goddess of victory! But now, in your desire to embrace the divine virtuous Seeta, the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi, you have embraced the goddess of earth with the chest which had once broken the tusks of the regional elephants!"* Consoling Vibheeshana, Jāmbavan said, "O mighty hero, you must not grieve as if you do not respect destiny, especially when you know how relentless it is." At the palace, Mandōdhari, looking like a doll with long eyes, heard of the death of Rāvana. Accompanied by crores of Rākshasis with dishevelled hair, who were raising a clamour and weeping bitterly, Mandōdhari reached the place where Rāvana lay dead.

The wails of the Rākshasis spread everywhere like calumnies about a noble person born in a royal family. Even the anklets and the toe-rings of the Rākshasis wailed.

** Soorpanakha's husband Vidyud Jihwa was killed by Rāvana during a fight with the Kālakeyas.*

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Some of the Rākshasis entered the towers and through them reached the battleground. Lamenting aloud that with the death of Rāvana, Devendra's enmity must have ceased, some Rākshasis came to the front through the sky. They descended like a cluster of clouds with a thunderous sound as if they were beckoning Rāvana. Profuse tears flowed from their black, collyrium-smeared doe-like eyes. Holding their hands over their heads, they fell on the shoulders of the mighty Rāvana like swans alighting on the sea. Sharing the several limbs of Rāvana (his heads, legs, tall shoulders and chest) between themselves, they embraced them, wept and became unconscious. They fell on his mountain-like shoulders, one on top of the other and embraced him as if they were embracing their own lives. The celestial women, the Nāga women and the celestial singers, too, embraced Rāvana's body in such a way that all those who witnessed it, found it disgusting. The women who embraced Rāvana wailed aloud and said, "Have you still not forgotten Seeta? Do you continue to imprison her in your mind forsaking dharma? That is why you do not talk to us who love you so dearly. You have neither opened your eyes and looked at us nor have you embraced us. Are you really dead, as others think?"

Mandōdhari, the daughter of Mayan, fell on the body of Rāvana, as lightning falls on the sea. In great grief, she wailed, "Is it fair that I should die after my beloved husband, the leader of the Rākshasās? Should I not have died before him? *I have departed from this convention.* Are these heads that lie scattered on the ground before me, my beloved's crowned heads, or his faces? How did great Rāvana die? Is it the result of his sins? In search of the life of the mighty Rāvana, the arrow of this man called Rāma, appears to have pierced his entire body without leaving even a tiny spot. Or, did Rāma's arrow search Rāvana's heart to find out whether he had imprisoned in it Seeta whose tresses are decked with fragrant flowers? Splitting Rāvana's handsome chest into a wide-mouthed cave, have Rāma's unique arrows gone beyond this world? Attacked by such arrows, Rāvana has fallen on the ground, deprived of his valour, prowess and the boons he had secured. I am ruined now. Can a single arrow snatch the life of Rāvana? Is the might of this man (Rāma) so great? *What a wonder that in the end, the grace and chastity of Seeta, a jewel among women, Rāvana's lust, the loss of Soorpanakha's nose and Rāma's arrival in the forest in ascetic attire in obedience to the commands of Emperor Dasaratha, have all resulted in great rewards for the penance done by Devendra!* Mighty as you were before the Devas, the regional elephants and the Trinity of Gods, I was proud that death could never overtake you. I never thought that there would be a man strong enough to destroy the fruits of the ocean of hard

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penances you eagerly undertook with great pains. I never believed that such a man could put an end to the protection you had secured from boons. I thought that there was none to destroy your life-span of three crore days and the might of your shoulders. *While I was carried away by your great boons which were like the ocean of milk, little did I realise that fate would make Seeta sour the sweetness of this milk.* Who is there who can know the ways of nature? My beloved who was a terror to all the fourteen worlds, has now gone to heaven leaving his body here. *A special target of Manmatha, Rāvana, has been felled by a mighty man!"* Lamenting in acute agony, Mandōdhari rose and embraced Rāvana's chest with her tender arms. She then stood up, called out Rāvana's name aloud and dropped dead. Celestial women and female singers, Rākshasis and sages, and all the Devas and terrestrial women of virtue, blessed Mandōdhari!.

With a grief-stricken heart, Vibheeshana laid the body of Rāvana on a pyre made of akhil and sandalwood and shaped like a vimānam (celestial chariot). After Rāvana's body was placed on the funeral pyre, Vibheeshana went round it. Conches blared drowning all other sounds. Completing the last rites, the heroic Vibheeshana moved towards the pyre (protected by the victorious royal white umbrella), followed by relatives and women. Lighting the fire and shedding copious tears, he fed it with the bodies of Rāvana and Mandōdhari. He also lit the pyres and methodically performed the last rites of all the other Rākshasās who had died. "No one has ever performed the last rites of departed souls so well, irrespective of the lives they led," was the universal praise showered on him. Looking at Vibheeshana who sought his divine feet, the charitable Rāma said, "O learned one, get rid of your mental agony. Those who are born are certain to die. This is a fundamental truth which has been in existence from time immemorial." With these words, Rāma consoled him and relieved him of his infinite sorrow.

37. LIBERATION AND RETURN

Rāma looked at Vibheeshana who had the good fortune of having sought his refuge, and said, "You are a scholar well-versed in the great doctrines expounded by Manu. You should be able to overcome your grief." Rāma then turned to the impeccable ascetic Lakshmana and said, "Go to the city of Lanka along with Sugreeva, Hanuman and the rest of the flawless vānara warriors. Adorn righteous Vibheeshana's head with the great crown in accordance with the Védas and as ordained by Lord Tirumāl." Coming to know of victorious Rāma's wish, the celestials along with the

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regional guards, rendered all help for Vibheeshana's coronation. They brought water from all the seas around the world and from holy rivers. They also brought a throne which looked as if it was borne by a lion. Ordered by Lord Brahma, the deer-faced divine architect Mayan put up a splendid hall for the coronation, using gold and gems for added lustre. Even Lord Siva and the Devas were wonder-struck at the grandeur of the coronation hall. As laid down in the scriptures, the Devas bathed Vibheeshana in all the holy waters. Directed by Rāma, leonine Lakshmana took the crown and placed it on Vibheeshana's head. Like a black mountain under a bright sun, Vibheeshana, the victorious crowned head of Lanka, sat on a mighty jewel-studded throne, while his jubilant Rākshasa kin applauded. The Devas showered karpaga flowers and all others affectionately showered various other flowers, on him. *The Trinity of Gods and the sages showered flowers of verbal blessings!*

Prostrating himself at his feet and offering him all his hospitality, Vibheeshana said to Lakshmana, "O hero with broad shoulders humbling mountains! Please rule this great city till I see Rāma and return." Vibheeshana then entrusted the kingdom to Lakshmana and reached the divine feet of Rāma who was adorned with the garland of victory. Accompanied by King Sugreeva and Angada the crown-prince, Vibheeshana paid obeisance to Rāma. Embracing Vibheeshana, Rāma said, "Rule Lanka and secure the worship of everyone from the three worlds. Uphold the dignity of the Devas, live with your kin and rule adhering to dharma. Establish glory and attain punyam." After blessing Vibheeshana, Rāma, who had gone to the forest in deference to the words of his stepmother, Kaikeyi, looked at the mighty Hanuman and said, "Go to Seeta and narrate all that happened here." The immortal Hanuman took leave of Rāma and reached the Asōka grove where Seeta (Goddess Lakshmi) had been incarcerated. To emaciated Seeta, Hanuman was like water which revives a withering flower-plant. He told her, "O innocent woman, felicitations to you! May you live long in prosperity! The venerable Rāma (the royal elephant) has trampled sinful Rāvana to death." Hanuman sang the divine name of Rāma several times, jumped and leapt left and right and danced ecstatically. Then, holding his handsome, trembling hands above his head, Hanuman stood before Seeta and said, "Rāvana's heads fell like mountains. His arms adorned with gems, fell like the rolling waves of the sea. His body was made to lie still on the ground. By the command of the great Rāma and the endless compassion of Vibheeshana, there is no one now in Lanka whose life has been spared except the women."

When conveying this sweet news to Seeta, Hanuman appeared like the moon which

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had grown full in a single phase without its deer-like flaw. On hearing his words, Seeta looked like the moon released from the clutches of Rāhu and Ketu. She became joyful. Her mouth and face bloomed like the water-lily. With great love for Rāma, her breasts swelled hurting her withered waist. Whether her forearms adorned with bangles or her breasts swelled more, as a result of her joy, none could say. Her beautiful eyebrows arched. With her lisping voice, Seeta thought of one thing but uttered something else, as if extreme joy could be as intoxicating as liquor! Seeta who had averted a blot on her conjugal life, not knowing what to say to Hanuman, remained silent. *The virtuous Hanuman looked at her and asked, "Are you silent because of your great joy or your misgivings that my message might be false?"* Seeta replied, "I did not know what to say because I was so excited. I wonder whether such great fortune can cause bewilderment of this type? When you first came here as a messenger, you promised to free me from captivity. You kept your word. You were helpful in getting rid of Rāvana and you have now brought me this happy news. What suitable reward can I give you for the unparalleled help rendered to me? My predicament that there was nothing worthy to offer you as a gift made me silent. Even a gift of the three worlds would be inadequate, and they (the three worlds) are also transient. *As there is nothing that is good enough to offer you, it is only proper that I bow my head to you! I remained silent because of my inability to give you an appropriate gift. You are a precious messenger like a polished gem fit for a jewel. What can I do for you? Please tell me."*

Hanuman replied, "You who are like an exquisite pea-hen moving in the forest! What greater gift can there be for me, other than taking and presenting you to Rāma? This will also be in tune with your great ecstasy. Dear mother! I seek another gift from you. Please permit me to destroy all these Rākshasi guards, except Tirisadai the flawless gem. These guards were all abusing you with unbecoming words and threatening to devour you. I will tear their huge rock-like bodies with my nails and offer them to Yama. I will snatch their bowels, drink their blood, smash their bodies out of shape and eat them." On hearing Hanuman's angry words, the Rākshasi guards sought Seeta's protection and fell at her divine feet. Seeta, the mother of the world, told them not to be afraid and granted them refuge. *Looking at the virtuous Hanuman, Seeta said, "What sins have these Rākshasis committed? They only did what their master had asked them to do. Hanuman! You are more compassionate than a mother. You must know that it was my destiny that was responsible for all my sufferings. It is not fair to be angry with these guards. After all, they are not as cruel as that hunch-backed Mantarai. Please do not harm these senseless Rākshasis though they are the*

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embodiment of cruel sins. This is the boon I seek from you." Assuring her that he would not harm them, Hanuman stood bowing to Seeta, the consort of his Lord Rāma. In the mean time, Rāma asked Vibheeshana to go and fetch Seeta after getting her suitably decked. Handsome Vibheeshana went to Seeta. He prostrated himself at her divine feet and said, "We have accomplished our task. Rāma, worshipped by the learned, wishes to see you. The Devas, too, have come to see you. Rāma has directed me to bring you before him. Please cast aside your agony, beautify yourself with ornaments, and come to him." Seeta replied, "O hero, the Devas, our Lord Rāma, the sages, and the virtuous celestial women should see me in my present state. It would be improper for me to beautify myself as suggested by you." After Vibhishana told Seeta that he was only acting on Rāma's instructions, she gave in. Celestial women like Tilottamai arrived to bathe and decorate Seeta. Menaka, Oorvasi and other celestials prepared a mixture of pure musk and civet, and went to Seeta who had fasted during the ten months she was imprisoned by Rāvana. Rambha the celestial dancer, carefully removed the knots and combed the tresses of Seeta (a beauty among women, a paragon of virtue, a touchstone for gold, and one who came, along with the nectar of immortality, from the ocean of milk) *the way Lord Tirumāl regularised and pruned the scriptures!* Seeta's teeth, resembling a row of pearls in her coral mouth, unattended for ten months, were cleansed by the celestial women. Singing divine songs, they smeared her hair with fragrant oil and bathed her. Seeta was burnished like burnishing a dusty jewel. Her crimson body was covered with fragrant white sandalwood paste like a beautiful coral creeper being covered with the foam of milk, and her bosom was smeared with vermilion. The celestial women dressed her in silk and adorned her waist with an ornament known as Meghalai. Seeta was decorated with jewels fit for the wife of Devendra. These jewels were made of star-like pearls, while the chains were made of gold. Her coral mouth was smeared with the sweet juice of betel leaves. With appropriate incantations, ārati was done to ward off evil.

Like the deer in the moon, Seeta was made to sit inside the celestial chariot. Accompanied by celestial women, and with the vānara warriors and Rākshasās running behind her, the great Vibheeshana brought Seeta before Rāma. Sages, Devas and their consorts, and women from all the three worlds who had assembled there, expressed their happiness. Everyone clustered around Seeta the jewel of chastity. People thronged behind her, in front of her and on either side of her. As they were trying to move close to her, the Rākshasās chased them away. The crowd became restive and raised a clamour which was like the roar of the dark sea. Rāma became

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angry. He wanted to know the cause of the clamour. The innocent sages explained the reason. Even before listening to them, Rāma laughed furiously. His lips quivering, he looked at Vibheeshana and said, "You are a scholar, having mastered the sacred lore. Why did you act improperly? Tell me who ordered the chasing away of the Devas and others who have come from long distances to look at the place that was the centre of fierce fighting. Have you ever seen Lord Siva, Lord Tirumāl and Lord Brahma without their consorts? When the Trinity of Gods are like this, should I talk of others? Boundless crowds of Devas and other sages have come to see me and the battlefield. Should they be driven away? O king of the Rākshasās, you are wrong in preventing the good-natured people from seeing me." With furious eyes, Rāma the Lord of the Védas, spoke thus to Vibheeshana the embodiment of virtue. Though he was absolutely blameless, Vibheeshana trembled with fear!

The great Seeta who equalled Arundati in her chastity, reached the battlefield and happily saw Rāma in his splendid battle-dress, holding his magnificent bow, Kōdandam, which had offered the bodies of Rākshasās as food to the mighty vultures and demons and relieved them of their hunger. With her big black eyes and her mind steeped in happiness, Seeta said to herself, *"Revealing my fidelity to my husband, making the people of the world recognise his valour, making everyone realise the greatness of my dynasty, and saving the world from destruction, became possible because of Hanuman. For these acts rendered by him, let my chastity grant him eternal life without fail. As Rāvana had imprisoned me in the Asōka grove, my body has become unclean. It is devoid of life and I have no desires either."* The flawless Seeta saw Rāma with the complexion of a green leaf and a coral like mouth, holding a bow in his hand. Seeta had arrived in a celestial chariot accompanied by celestial women. As if a lifeless body saw again the life (in Rāma) that had left her, and she was trying to show her face to her lord, Seeta stepped on the earth from the celestial chariot. She was free from sorrow with the thought, "Rāma shall be my mate, in all my births and even if I am freed from the agony of births. I have seen my lord now and I have paid obeisance to him. It is good whether I forget him hereafter or I fall dead!" Rāma who had compassion for all living beings, looked intently at Seeta, the queen of chastity, the embodiment of feminine virtues, the beauty of beauties, the prime cause of glorious life and the very concept of dharma and grace who had been separated from him. He saw light coloured spots created by the flow of river-like tears, on her tender breasts, showing her profound grief.

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Looking at Seeta, with the fury of a hooded cobra, Rāma said, "You lived for a long period in the big city of Lanka belonging to that immoral Rākshasa and you were under his care. You willingly consumed tasty food there. You did not die though you lost your character. How dare you come fearlessly before me? Do you think that I still desire you? It was not for redeeming you from your prison that the sea was blocked with rocks, a Sétu was put up, Rākshasās with lustrous weapons were annihilated, and my powerful enemy Rāvana was killed in a fierce battle. I came to the city of Lanka only to free myself from the criticism that I failed to kill the foe who took away my wife! You have forfeited my love for you! Did you not eat animals' flesh, considering it more delicious than nectar, and consume liquor in Lanka? Is there any other feast that you are going to prepare for me henceforth? Tell me. *Great qualities and virtues, the best ornamental gems, have all forsaken you. You displayed the qualities of a worm because you rose from the earth, and not from a noble dynasty. Owing to your birth, all the fine qualities like womanliness, greatness, respectable heredity, chastity, character, clarity of mind, glory, and truth, have perished like the vanishing of the fame of a king dispossessed of the quality of charity. When separated from their husbands, women hailing from noble families keep their five senses under control without going astray.* Maintaining their chastity and following an ascetic life, they do not even comb their hair, allowing it to become matted. If, however, any blemish were to fall on them, they would erase it by ending their lives. Why do I tell you all this? It is only because my senses have become benumbed by your characterless life. The only thing you can do now is either die or go wherever you wish."

Rāma's words made the sages, celestials, countless number of women, Rākshasās, and vānaras cry bitterly with their mouths wide open. Seeta (an incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi) who had all along held her head down, looking at the earth out of shyness and borne the pangs of separation from Rāma, on hearing his cruel words, suffered acute agony which was worse than that caused when an ulcer is prodded with a stick. She shed copious tears of blood, heaved a deep sigh, and lost her senses. *She was like a dying deer (suffering from thirst in a vulture-infested desert) which sees a source of water but is unable to utilise it. The great hurdle raised to prevent her from joining her husband, stunned her.* Shedding torrential tears, Seeta said aloud, "This is the reward I get for leading an impeccable life all these days. With this, my good fortune appears to have deserted me." *Addressing Rāma, she said, "O charitable lord, Hanuman came to the Asōka grove, saw me there and told me he was your emissary. He*

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consoled me by telling me that you would redeem me after vanquishing the enemies. Did not that great Hanuman inform you how depressed I was then? Was Hanuman not your emissary? My great penance, my virtuous deeds and my untainted chastity which I had been assiduously guarding all these days, have not been discerned by your noble mind. I feel they have all been reduced to the state of mad and useless acts. Foolish as I was, I thought I was the most chaste wife in this world. Even Lord Brahma could not shake my complacence. But if Rāma, the darling of the world, is to repudiate that, is there any God who can change such a view? Though the Trinity of Gods can see everything as clearly as a fruit placed on an open palm, are they capable of knowing the minds of women?. O embodiment of the Védas! Who else should I convince of my flawless chastity? Nothing will be greater for me now than giving up my life which you, too, have rightly asked me to do." Turning to Lakshmana, Seeta bade him prepare a fire for her. Lakshmana who was in agony, looked at Rāma the seat of universal surrender, and got the latter's approval through his eyes. After knowing Rāma's mind, Lakshmana appeared lifeless. Shedding torrential tears, he kindled the fire as prescribed in the sacred texts.

Seeta, an incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi, the mother of all, including the Devas, reached the sacred fire prepared by Lakshmana. Unable to witness this ghastly sight, the four Védas, the eternal dharma and all beings wept aloud. With the intention of entering the fire, Seeta went round it. All worlds, all the celestials, and all groups of beings became destabilised. They cried bitterly saying that such anger was unworthy of Rāma. The celestial women including Devendra's consort stood in the sky weeping and beating their beautiful red eyes with their tender red hands. The leading Devas and Lord Brahma shivered! The whole world suffered as if it was affected by the venom ejected from the shrunken hood of the divine serpent, Ādisesha. The sun and the planets exchanged their positions and even the seas wailed. *With a heavy heart, Seeta told Agni, "If I am guilty in thought or word, burn me ruthlessly."* After making obeisance to Rāma who was wearing a tulasi garland, Seeta entered the fire, as if she were returning to the lotus, her old abode. *The fire instantly rose like a white flame of cotton owing to the fire of her chastity.* Suffering severely, with his body burning, Agni sought refuge in Rāma who was the flame of scriptural knowledge. Agni wept aloud and prayed, as he rose from the fire-pit holding Seeta in his handsome hands. Even the droplets of sweat on Seeta's face caused by her husband's wrath remained as they were, as if no further evidence was needed to prove her chastity. The flowers adorning her hair along with the humming bees were not burnt. Instead, they remained cool as

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Looking at Seeta, with the fury of a hooded cobra, Rāma said, "You lived for a long period in the big city of Lanka belonging to that immoral Rākshasa and you were under his care. You willingly consumed tasty food there. You did not die though you lost your character. How dare you come fearlessly before me? Do you think that I still desire you? It was not for redeeming you from your prison that the sea was blocked with rocks, a Sétu was put up, Rākshasās with lustrous weapons were annihilated, and my powerful enemy Rāvana was killed in a fierce battle. I came to the city of Lanka only to free myself from the criticism that I failed to kill the foe who took away my wife! You have forfeited my love for you! Did you not eat animals' flesh, considering it more delicious than nectar, and consume liquor in Lanka? Is there any other feast that you are going to prepare for me henceforth? Tell me. *Great qualities and virtues, the best ornamental gems, have all forsaken you. You displayed the qualities of a worm because you rose from the earth, and not from a noble dynasty. Owing to your birth, all the fine qualities like womanliness, greatness, respectable heredity, chastity, character, clarity of mind, glory, and truth, have perished like the vanishing of the fame of a king dispossessed of the quality of charity. When separated from their husbands, women hailing from noble families keep their five senses under control without going astray.* Maintaining their chastity and following an ascetic life, they do not even comb their hair, allowing it to become matted. If, however, any blemish were to fall on them, they would erase it by ending their lives. Why do I tell you all this? It is only because my senses have become benumbed by your characterless life. The only thing you can do now is either die or go wherever you wish."

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consoled me by telling me that you would redeem me after vanquishing the enemies. Did not that great Hanuman inform you how depressed I was then? Was Hanuman not your emissary? My great penance, my virtuous deeds and my untainted chastity which I had been assiduously guarding all these days, have not been discerned by your noble mind. I feel they have all been reduced to the state of mad and useless acts. Foolish as I was, I thought I was the most chaste wife in this world. Even Lord Brahma could not shake my complacence. But if Rāma, the darling of the world, is to repudiate that, is there any God who can change such a view? Though the Trinity of Gods can see everything as clearly as a fruit placed on an open palm, are they capable of knowing the minds of women?. O embodiment of the Védas! Who else should I convince of my flawless chastity? Nothing will be greater for me now than giving up my life which you, too, have rightly asked me to do." Turning to Lakshmana, Seeta bade him prepare a fire for her. Lakshmana who was in agony, looked at Rāma the seat of universal surrender, and got the latter's approval through his eyes. After knowing Rāma's mind, Lakshmana appeared lifeless. Shedding torrential tears, he kindled the fire as prescribed in the sacred texts.

Seeta, an incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi, the mother of all, including the Devas, reached the sacred fire prepared by Lakshmana. Unable to witness this ghastly sight, the four Védas, the eternal dharma and all beings wept aloud. With the intention of entering the fire, Seeta went round it. All worlds, all the celestials, and all groups of beings became destabilised. They cried bitterly saying that such anger was unworthy of Rāma. The celestial women including Devendra's consort stood in the sky weeping and beating their beautiful red eyes with their tender red hands. The leading Devas and Lord Brahma shivered! The whole world suffered as if it was affected by the venom ejected from the shrunken hood of the divine serpent, Ādisesha. The sun and the planets exchanged their positions and even the seas wailed. *With a heavy heart, Seeta told Agni, "If I am guilty in thought or word, burn me ruthlessly."* After making obeisance to Rāma who was wearing a tulasi garland, Seeta entered the fire, as if she were returning to the lotus, her old abode. *The fire instantly rose like a white flame of cotton owing to the fire of her chastity.* Suffering severely, with his body burning, Agni sought refuge in Rāma who was the flame of scriptural knowledge. Agni wept aloud and prayed, as he rose from the fire-pit holding Seeta in his handsome hands. Even the droplets of sweat on Seeta's face caused by her husband's wrath remained as they were, as if no further evidence was needed to prove her chastity. The flowers adorning her hair along with the humming bees were not burnt. Instead, they remained cool as

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though immersed in water. The worlds which were destabilised when she entered the fire, returned to normalcy. All those who felt sorry for her were relieved of their fear. Chaste women, including Arundati, giving up their shyness, danced ecstatically.

Agni told Rāma, "You subjected me to the fire of the divine chastity of your noble wife. You displayed your anger not only to your wife, Seeta, but also to me who had done you no harm." Rāma looked at him and asked, "Who are you? What is it that you said appearing in the midst of the fire? Who asked you to protect this woman of no character? Answer me." Agni replied, "I am the god of fire. I have been burnt by the raging fire of the chastity of Seeta, the mother of the world. Unable to bear the pain, I have come before you. How can you, a witness to everything in this world, still doubt the character of this great woman even after seeing all that has happened to me? O possessor of lustrous and mighty shoulders! You are aware that the scriptures have explicitly said that the weddings of noble women take place with me as the witness and that even for clearing the slur cast on the character of a married woman, I am sought to bear testimony. Though you respected the words of truthful Hanuman, you did not accept them and redeem Seeta. You should have ascertained all the facts, got rid of your doubts, and taken her back. Did you not see the Devas, sages and all moving animate objects in the three worlds, beating their eyes with their hands and crying loudly, unable to bear the gruesome sight of Seeta entering the fire? Why did you seek this path, giving up dharma? If this most virtuous Seeta were to become furious, the clouds will cease to shower rains, the earth will crack and will start devouring living beings, virtuous acts will no longer be performed and the world will not last. If she were to utter a curse, will not even Lord Brahma die?" Withered by the fire of Seeta's chastity, Agni spoke these great words to Rāma and brought the peacock-complexioned Seeta to him. There was jubilation and ecstatic dancing among the Devas and the living beings of all the worlds in recognition of the chastity of great Seeta. Addressing Agni, the compassionate Rāma said, "Unfailing in justice, you are a great witness of everything happening in all the worlds. *You have spoken noble words and proved that Seeta was never guilty. I agree that she is flawless and deserves not to be discarded by me."*

The Devas approached Lord Brahma and said, "Rāma, posing to be ignorant of his real divinity, is imposing on himself illusions of his own creation, simulating ordinary mortals. In Rāma, Paramātma (the divine soul) mingles with Jeevātma (the individual soul) to lead a life of illusion. The time has arrived to apprise him of the facts." Acceding to their request, Lord Brahma told Rāma, *"O Supreme Lord! Do not be*

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under the impression that you are merely a man hailing from an ancient royal dynasty. Please listen to what I have to say. There is no finality in the realm of scriptures other than you. Except you, there is nothing in the world which is eternal. You do not undergo any change and you are the origin of everything. Standing apart, you are beyond the comprehension of all. You are the soul of every life. All the scenes discerned in this wide world are the result of your magnificent illusion. O lover of all beings! Original appearance and the final state, are the two sides of the essence of the Védas. They transcend all attempts to comprehend you. They hail only you as the Supreme Lord which term refers only to you and not to any of us who have come here; You are the Supreme Lord for all of us including me, Lord Siva, Devendra and the sages, and for all animate objects. Those who realise this unique stature of yours will be released from the bondage of worldly entanglements (which bind them in this birth as well as subsequent ones) and will attain eternal bliss. Many of the lives which originate through me, develop attachment to their parents, entangle themselves in illusions without understanding their real state and suffer instead of getting eternal bliss. Only those who free themselves from this ignorance, realising that you are the cause of everything, can sow the seeds for their salvation. When we analyse and understand twenty-five principles, you will appear over and above them, as the twenty-sixth principle beyond which there is nothing! The scriptures affirm this. People of the world bear testimony to this axiomatic truth. *Any attempt by anybody to prove or disprove your supremacy will appear ridiculous because you are far beyond their comprehension.* Though the Upanishads cannot measure you or identify you, they do confirm your presence through their inward vision! *Those who do not receive your grace will find the five senses to be impediments to the realisation of your presence and will be caught in the cycle of births and deaths. To get rid of their agony, they have no place of refuge, except your divine feet.*

"There is no object that can claim to have brought you forth. The powerful origin — the cause of visible creation — came from you. Even the five elements will disintegrate and perish during pralaya but not you, because you are eternal. Just as clouds create lightning, you stand apart, having created me to create these ephemeral worlds as well as to establish dharma therein. Along with their end, you decide my end also. Though you do not show me your complete form, I am able to visualise you to some extent through the Védas. You create all worlds taking my form. You protect them by making your appearance in the middle. You finally destroy them in the guise of Lord Siva. These acts of yours resemble the sun who creates daytime with his form

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and is thus seen by all. Those who know the meaning of the Pranava, namely 'OM', the main prefix for any incantation, can know you as you exist. By realising that you are the embodiment of Pranava they will be emancipated from the chain of *punyam* and *pāpam* the results of virtuous acts and sinful deeds. *Those, who, with their shallow outward knowledge, try to indulge in the futile exercise of dichotomy and consider you an object of Pranava will never be able to free themselves from the aforesaid chain for any length of time."* Brahma, the most ancient one, hailing from the navel of Lord Tirumāl and the creator of life and other limbs of the Jeevatma (the individual soul), concluded by telling Rāma, "This is the nature of your outward and inward form. Therefore please do not needlessly show your aversion towards our mother Seeta, who, besides exhibiting the greatness of married life and domestic virtues, has brought forth all of us and the three worlds."

Then Lord Siva told Rāma, "O mighty Rāma, you do not seem to have realised your divine nature at all. You are the ancient and Supreme God. Seeta, the mother of the three worlds, is none other than Goddess Lakshmi dwelling in the divine bosom of Lord Tirumāl, namely yourself! The universal mother, Seeta, is not a sinful woman to be discarded by you. If due to a misconception you desert her, such a deed will result in the loss of several lives. You must give up humiliating her." Thereafter, Lord Siva went to Dasaratha who was in heaven and said, "Please visit Rāma, clear his mind with appropriate words of advice and relieve yourself of your deep, long-standing sorrow." Bound by Siva's advice, Dasaratha came to the terrestrial world to see his beloved son. Immediately, Rāma, the Lord of the Védas, prostrated himself at Dasaratha's sacred feet. After lifting Rāma with his hands, Dasaratha with his rock-like bosom embraced him, bathed him with tears, became elated and got rid of his agony of separation. He told Rāma, "When I wanted to crown you, a spear (in the guise of a boon secured by Kaikeyi) pierced my heart and remained there all along, even after I died. But after embracing you I am relieved of this spear. O possessor of graceful shoulders! You are an incarnation of Lord Tirumāl. You took birth as my son and enhanced my greatness. Born as my son, you made even lofty ones with noble sons unequal to the dust of my feet. As a result, I have been endowed with heavenly bliss and glory, which even those who are free from sins, find difficult to attain. Earlier, I used to offer worship to the Devas and sages but now they worship me, several times, with folded hands. Further, you have caused me to be seated on the shell surrounding the earth, on par with Lord Brahma hailing from the navel of Lord Tirumāl!"

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Mountain-shouldered Dasaratha, embraced his son several times. Then he went to Seeta. She prostrated herself at his divine feet. The glorious Dasaratha embraced Seeta and said, "O noble woman, do not hold Rāma's command asking you to enter fire against him. He did so only to remove any doubts about your chastity. It is customary in the world to clear a person's name by swearing in the name of God. Therefore, do not be furious with Rāma. *It will be proper for you to think that the melting of gold in fire is only to bring out its purity and flawless nature. Noble Rāma felt that it might be difficult for posterity to know that you are the queen of chastity.* O doll-like Seeta, among virtuous women, including Arundati, you are a shining exquisite jewel. Unlike others, your birth-place is the earth itself. Coming from Vaikuntham, you took birth as Seeta, while Lord Tirumāl took the incarnation of Rāma. Your invaluable virtues can never be blemished." Seeta felt happy. Her mind was free from disgust towards Rāma for having asked her to enter fire.

The great Dasaratha turned to Lakshmana. The tears of joy shed by Dasaratha were as profuse as the water that dripped from Lakshmana's tuft after his bath. He held Lakshmana in a tight embrace which made their two bodies look like one, and said, "O son, you followed your brother, Rāma, closely from the very moment he left for the forest. You served him well and removed my mental agony. You have also freed yourself from, the cycle of rebirth which is not easy. The Devas and others have been paying glowing tributes to the mighty, tall shoulders with which you courageously fought Indrajit and established dharma." Dasaratha then asked Rāma to seek a boon. Rāma replied, "I was hoping to reach heaven, meet you there and be relieved of my agony. Instead, your arrival here has enabled me to see you now. What else is there for me to obtain?" When Dasaratha insisted, the handsome Rāma said, "Please grant me the boon of making Goddess Kaikeyi (whom you had cast away as cruel) my mother, and her son, Bharata, my brother." With these words, Rāma made obeisance to Dasaratha. Moved by Rāma's nobility, all the beings of the world praised him and gave him a jubilant ovation. *Dasaratha told Rāma, "O granter of boons, listen to me. Let the blemishless Bharata, be a son to me and brother to you as you wish, but my anger towards that sinner, Kaikeyi, who prevented your coronation and made you don an ascetic's attire, will never cease."* Though Dasaratha released Rāma from his embrace, he was released from his anger only when Rāma said, "I agreed in the beginning to reign and protect all beings, without realising that my action would lead to a great crime. Therefore, you should hate *me* and not my mother Kaikeyi!"

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Feeling compassion for Rāma, who transcended all boons, the Devas said, "Two were the boons given by Dasaratha to Kaikeyi who made Rāma enter the boundless forest full of enemies; and two were the boons given by the same Dasaratha to Rāma who had acted in accordance with the earlier boons." After conferring the boons on Rāma, the truthful Dasaratha, lauded by the Devas and others for giving up his life for the sake of truth, instructed Rāma, Lakshmana and Seeta to continue to dwell on earth. Dasaratha, boarding the celestial chariot, then went to heaven. The large gathering of Devas saw Rāma and asked him to seek boons from them. Rāma replied, "Please restore the lives of all those killed and destroyed by the Rākshasās in the fierce war. I seek another boon. All the forests, mountains and other places inhabited by monkeys should have plenty of fruits, vegetables, roots and honeycombs. The entire place should have large sources of sweet drinking water." The Devas, Lord Siva, the sages, and Devendra, individually paid obeisance to Rāma and joyfully told him, "You are the Lord who severs the cruel chain of rebirth which is the cause of all afflictions. By your grace, let the monkeys get back their lives and let there be plenty of food for them." All the vānaras who died in the war got back their lives at once. They raised a clamour at the thought of the victory achieved by them. With joy in their eyes and hearts, they approached the lotus-eyed Rāma and paid homage to him. When herds of monkeys who rose alive were giving an ovation to Rāma, the Devas looked at him and said, "On the eighth day of the waxing moon, resting on the Suvela mountain, you had commenced (along with the vānara army) the invasion of Lanka. Thereafter, with your lotus hands, you annihilated the treacherous Rākshasās and killed Rāvana on the final day of the waning moon. Obeying the words of your mother, you went to the forest and stayed there for fourteen years. That period is already over. Today is the fifth day of the waxing moon. *O victorious hero, if you do not reach Bharata today, he will enter fire and end his life as he had sworn earlier. To prevent this, please go to him at once." Advising Rāma thus, the Devas left.*

Anxious to reach Bharata, Rāma said, "If the period of fourteen years of exile in the forest ends today and I fail to reach Bharata, he is certain to die, resulting in the extinction of my dynasty." Rāma then asked Vibheeshana whether a chariot was available to take him to Bharata immediately. Vibheeshana replied, "A vimānam is available for taking you to Bharata today. This flowery celestial chariot, had long ago been taken forcefully by Rāvana from Kubera along with his wealth. This vimānam knows no fatigue. You can conveniently reach the beautiful city of Ayōdhya with all the seventy vellam vānaras in it. It was presented by Lord Brahma to Kubera, in

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recognition of the latter's penance. As pure as the minds of sages who are free from bondage, this vimānam will fly fast surprising even the Devas!" At Rāma's behest, the vimānam was immediately brought by Vibheeshana. It looked like the fusion of the three worlds. The thousands of bells fitted to it jingled loudly. Confident that his task was certain to be accomplished, Rāma boarded the vimānam. The Devas blessed him, showered flowers on him and raised a jubilant uproar. The slim-waisted Tirisadai paid her respects to the most virtuous Seeta who blessed the former to shine always in Lanka without any suffering, like a celestial. Seeta then got into the vimānam along with Rāma, followed by leonine Lakshmana. The vimānam was like Lord Tirumāl's belly which had contained the entire world during pralaya. Moving faster than wind, it could traverse the sky with the speed of thought!

Rāma said to Vibheeshana, *"Do only good to all those who seek your support. Your reign should be full of welfare measures, making the citizens of the land say of you that there is none comparable to you in this regard. Rule justly. You have the capacity to teach others what is just. You are a descendant of Lord Brahma, the preceptor of the four Vēdas. You may now go to the fortified city of Lanka and make even your enemies worship you."* Taking leave of Vibheeshana, Rāma turned to Sugreeva and said, "With the strength of *your* shoulders, I was able to kill the ten–necked Rāvana. Return home and live happily giving a well-deserved rest to your army of exhausted vānaras." Rāma then blessed Angada the son of Vāli, Jāmbavan, Panasan, Neelan and other commanders of the army and also Hanuman, the graceful hero who had leapt across the sea. Rāma asked them all to go back home. The words of Rāma, however, made Sugreeva and the others sad. The thought of leaving Rāma, made them shed tears. Their minds and bodies trembled. They prostrated themselves at the divine lotus feet of Rāma, with their crowns on, and said, "We will not survive, if you leave us." Sugreeva, Vibheeshana and the rest who deeply loved Rāma, told him, "Please send us back to our abodes only after you have given us a chance to watch to our hearts' content the beauty and glory of your coronation and your golden crown set with pearls." Listening to them, the noble Rāma said, "Please do not be worried. I, too, felt the same way. I was only trying to ascertain your views!" Sugreeva, Vibheeshana and all others were thrilled as if they had reached heaven along with their bodies. They prostrated themselves at the lotus feet of Rāma, the ruler of the world.

Inviting Sugreeva and his army along with the commanders, including Hanuman and Vibheeshana, Rāma said, "Please get into the vimānam." Immediately, Sugreeva, the army

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commanders, seventy vellam vānaras, Vibheeshana and his vast army rushed and sat in the vimānam. Except Muktas (those who are released from the earthly prison), who else can describe the characteristics of this vimānam? The seventy vellam vānaras, Sugreeva, the flawless Vibheeshana and his big army stood surrounding the great Lakshmana and Seeta, worshipping virtuous Rāma, who was seated magnificently in the vimānam which looked like the very world. Rāma appeared like the heavenly, lustrous, ancient, Supreme God, transcending the four Védas. Sugreeva wearing a floral crown, Vibheeshana, the king of Lanka, big commanders of both the armies and others, transformed themselves into humans, on the advice of Rāma. Proceeding northwards, as if the sun had forsaken the habit of rising in the east after setting in the west, the celestial vimānam sped towards Ayōdhya without any hurdle.

Looking at Seeta who was highly impressed with the celestial vimānam brought by the victorious Vibheeshana, Rāma showed her Lanka (in the south) and other places. The moment Rāma desired to go round the city of Lanka, the vimānam began to move as he wished. When it reached the eastern gateway of Lanka, Rāma told Seeta that Pragattan, the Rākshasa, was killed there by the handsome hands of Neelan. On reaching the southern gateway, Rāma showed Seeta the place where Angada had slain Subārsuvan. At the western gate, Rāma told Seeta, "Venomous Indrajit who had vanquished Devendra, was killed here by my younger brother, Lakshmana." *When the vimānam sped to the northern gate of Lanka, Rāma said, "This is the place where, Rāvana lost his ten heads and died!* After several days of separation from you, I befriended Soorya's son Sugreeva. At his behest, Hanuman saw you, relieved you of your anxiety, and told me of your whereabouts. To launch a war and redeem you, the leaders of the vānara army built the Sétu which you can see now. How can I describe the Sétu, the purity of which even Lord Brahma cannot adequately extol? Yet, please listen to me! This Sétu is so sacred that on seeing it, even sinners who have harmed their loving parents, preceptors, and kin will be absolved of their sins and become Devas. *While one must plunge into the sacred rivers like the Ganga, Yamuna, Gōdavari and Kāveri to remove sins, a mere look at this Sétu is enough to remove them. The sacred River Ganga, hailing from the tuft of Lord Siva, is performing penance, grieving that she did not have the good fortune of becoming this Sétu!"*

When the celestial vimānam reached a place known as Dharbhasayanam, Rāma told Seeta, "It was here that, unable to bear the fierceness of my Agni-astram, Varuna surrendered to me and sought my protection. *This is the mountain where the Tamil*

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sage, Agastya, the author of Tamil grammar stays. The other mountain with plenty of gems is a mountain created by Lord Tirumāl. Next to that is the Tiruvenkata mountain." *Seeta asked Rāma, "Which is the place where you found Hanuman?" Rāma pointed out Rishyamukham and said, "That is the place."* He also showed Seeta the abode of Sugreeva who possessed the innate qualities of erudite elders. Then Seeta told Rāma, "If what we see below is Kishkinda, please consider my request. When you are surrounded and accompanied by several crores of Devas and victorius warriors, I feel that reaching the city of Ayōdhya as a solitary woman will not look proper. We will take vānara women with us." Rāma conveyed this to Sugreeva. Commanded by him, the noble Hanuman enabled crowds of vānara women possessing dark hair to board the vimānam which was brought down. They paid their respects to their king (Sugreeva) and made obeisance to Rāma and the queen of womanhood, Seeta. Bringing sacred and precious articles with them, the vānara women presented them to Seeta. They surrounded and worshipped her. *Seeta felt elated and said that there was nothing more that she needed thereafter.* The lustrous vimānam rose into the sky with the speed of thought. As it coursed through the sky, Rāma told Seeta, "The river you see there is Gōdāvari. The place that looks like a tall mountain near that river is where our separation and sorrow began. This is the Dandaka forest where eminent sages doing yāgas live. What you see there is the Citrakoota mountain. *The one here is the hermitage of Sage Bharadwaja."*

While Rāma was explaining these details to Seeta, the unique Sage Bharadwaja learnt through his inner vision of the arrival of Rāma and felt happy that he (Rāma) who had taken him as his devotee had come! The sage went with his kin to welcome Rāma. *To Rāma, who saw him coming, holding the umbrella and the kamandalam (sacred jug) in one hand and the Brahmadandam (sacred stick) in the other, it appeared as though the quintessence of great penance performed by a scholar renowned for his ethics was coming towards him in the form of a ripe old sage.* He decided to bring down the Pushpaka vimānam. The vimānam landed on the ground like a golden celestial world coming down with its inhabitants. *Rāma who has captivated me (Kamban) hastened forward and prostrated himself at the divine feet of Sage Bharadwaja, the great exponent of the Védas, whose only wealth was penance.* The noble Bharadwaja lifted Rāma, embraced him, blessed him and kissed his head. Bathing him with profuse tears, Bharadwaja affectionately washed away the dust from Rāma's tuft of hair. Seeta and Lakshmana, too, paid their obeisance to the sage who blessed them heartily. Bharadwaja felt as if he had consumed divine nectar. Sugreeva,

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Vibheeshana and other warriors were also blessed by Bharadwaja as they paid homage to him. Accompanied by other great sages, Bharadwaja entered his beautiful hermitage along with Rāma and extended faultless hospitality to him.

Looking several times at Rāma, Bharadwaja shed tears of joy and said, "O hero, with your mighty bow, you have destroyed the cruel Rākshasās who harassed and caused agony to the sages and the inhabitants of the three worlds. You made demons dance in the battlefield. We have nothing more to seek from you. With your unique weapons, you protected the world by destroying Virādha, Khara, Mārica (in the guise of an illusive deer), the mighty Kavandha, Vāli, a shark-ridden sea, Rāvana and Kumbhakarna. O knowledgeable one, leaving Citrakootam and reaching the Dandaka forest in your sojourn in the south, you removed the evils caused by the Rākshasās. With your bent bow, you removed the agony of the Devas and protected all the worlds! Please stay here as my guest today." Bharadwaja who had seen the ultimate in the Védas added, *"I will tell you now about the blemishless and noble Bharata. Please listen. Bharata has a body that constantly sweats, has a flood of tears flowing from his eyes, has a noble mind devoid of evil designs, weeps bitterly in sorrow, looks only in the southern direction (not looking elsewhere even absent-mindedly), and is the very embodiment of agony and concern! He has controlled all his senses. Avoiding rich food, he has been living on fruits and vegetables. He has a bed made of grass that horses eat. Bharata has been chanting your divine name day and night. Renouncing ancient Ayōdhya, he lives in a village known as Nandi."* Addressing Bharadwaja, Rāma said, "O Sage, you are so lofty that Lord Siva and Lord Brahma worship you! Having worshipped you the greatest of all sages, I have attained greatness by your grace. I have thus become a unique son who can be compared to none other than myself." Sage Bharadwaja looked at Rāma with compassion and said, "Please seek a boon of your choice." Rāma said, "I want the victorious vānaras to live without any hardship, getting whatever they want. In whichever forest they wish to roam, there should be plenty of fruits, vegetables and roots always available, as bountifully as in the rainy season. Please grant me this boon." Bharadwaja who had great penances to his credit, gave the boon sought by Rāma and requested him to accept a feast for himself and his beloved armies. The great sage then made offerings to his chosen deity, in the presence of three blazing fires. The Devas arrived and a feast was arranged. King Sugreeva and all the warriors feasted and enjoyed themselves fully. Bharadwaja fed Rāma in a royal manner with exquisite food of six varieties. In the meantime, Rāma told Hanuman, "Please proceed at once to Ayōdhya, go to Nandi and tell Bharata about my welfare.

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Prevent him from falling into the fire and assure him that we will be reaching Ayōdhya at the appointed time." Rāma then gave his ring to Hanuman to show to Bharata. Obeying Rāma, Hanuman proceeded with the speed of his father, Vāyu, and the speed of Rāma's arrow. Flying faster than his own mind, Hanuman halted for a while at Sringaberam to inform Guhan of the return of Rāma and soared into the sky again.

So far, we have described noble Rāma's activities in the southern region in detail. Let us now narrate the happenings around the famous city of Ayōdhya, to which Hanuman sped. In the beautiful village of Nandi near Ayōdhya, Bharata worshipped Rāma with devotion, not during the usual morning, midday and evening hours of worship alone, but throughout the day! The fire of agony caused by Rāma's absence melted Bharata's very bones. *Love and affection which had never before taken any visible form, were now personified as Bharata!* The moment he thought of Rāma in the forest, Bharata's wide eyes would shed profuse tears. Though he stayed in a land full of groves, Bharata, denying himself regular food, led an austere life, eating only roots, fruits and vegetables. Always looking towards the south from where his brother, Rāma, was expected to come, Bharata never looked in any other direction. He was certain that Rāma would never lie. He would surely return. Longing for that moment to come, he was in agony, and kept sighing sorrowfully. *His tears would never end till he saw the sacred waters flowing down from the crown of King Rāma who is regarded as the source of all water and life itself!* While worshipping Rāma's sandals which he had decorated with flowers, the noble Bharata thought of the promised date of his arrival and sent for expert astrologers. They arrived and told Bharata that the fourteen years of Rāma's exile ended that day.

Wise and heroic Bharata had spurned the wealth of the kingdom and had gone to the forest to request Rāma to return to Ayōdhya. Recalling Rāma's reply which had hurt him deeply, Bharata fell unconscious. After he regained his senses, his lotus eyes were red with tears because Rāma had not yet arrived. Rising to his feet in great agony, Bharata thought, "Rāma must be aware of the promised day of his return to Ayōdhya after the fourteen years of exile, of the extreme agony I am undergoing on account of his absence and also of the love his mother showers on him. Bearing all this in mind, Rāma will no longer remain in the forest. He has not returned because some foes might have tried to take his life." Bharata later shed his doubt with the thought, "There is none even among the Supreme Lords, or among those living in the land, sky, or the nether world, who can face my brother, Rāma, in war." Bharata feared that Rāma had

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not come because he must have thought, *"Having ruled the country for fourteen years, if Bharata desires to rule longer, let him do so."* Bharata then decided, "Let Rāma continue to remain in the forest or return to this land. Come what may, I will not hereafter care to indulge in futile thoughts. I shall get rid of my sorrow by putting an end to my life." When Bharata asked his messengers to bring Satrughna, he instantly appeared before Bharata and paid homage to him. Holding Satrughna tightly against his tear-soaked bosom and weeping bitterly, Bharata said, "I wish to seek a boon from you that deserves to be granted. Rāma has not returned on the appointed day. I am going to fall into the bright fire and end my life, as I had vowed. You must become the king of Ayōdhya." *Satrughna was stunned. He closed his ears with his huge hands and was in great agony as if he had been fed poison. He stood trembling with his eyes throbbing. He fell down several times and got up.* Sobbing bitterly, heaving a hot sigh with rising fury, Satrughna asked Bharata, "What harm have I done to you who are steeped in sorrow?" With sarcasm, Satrughna continued, "The eldest son, Rāma, gave up ruling the land and went away to rule the forest. He was followed, to the forest, by a younger brother (Lakshmana). Now that the day for the return of Rāma from the forest has elapsed, yet another younger brother (Bharata) proposes to end his life. Born along with such noble brothers, should the last brother, shamelessly rule this big world? *How 'sweet' is this sovereignty thrust on me!* After Rāma left for the forest giving up the prosperous city of Ayōdhya, you stayed here at Nandi outside Ayōdhya, leading the life of an ascetic. When such is your greatness, how can you think that I will ever live, after you enter fire and end your life? *The thought of my surviving your death, is as treacherous as my wanting to rule when you are alive."*

Bharata replied, "Is it not because Rāma thinks that I am willingly ruling this land, that he has not returned? If I lay down my life, Rāma will not allow this world to languish without a ruler. He will change his mind and return at once to rule the land. Therefore, please prepare a fire for me to end my life." When these words reached Ayōdhya and the chaste Kausalya heard them, she was shocked. Beating her belly, she rushed to Bharata crying, "Dear son, if you indulge in self-immolation, the entire world will be destroyed at once." Lamenting Kausalya, with a burning heart and a weak physique, came running to prevent her son Bharata from entering the fire. Ministers, army commanders, masters of the scriptures, beautiful women, and various other citizens belonging to Ayōdhya, raising their hands over their heads, wept and followed Kausalya. Devendra, the sages and the celestials extolled her. With dishevelled hair and torrential tears, Kausalya intercepted Bharata who was on his

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way to the cremation ground where a fire was being lit by Satrughna. Bharata who had everlasting love for Rāma, was shocked and frightened to see her. He paid his respects to her by falling at her feet.

Embracing Bharata, faultless Kausalya told him, "What Emperor Dasaratha did (giving up his life) and what my son Rāma did (going to the forest), were both due to my fate, determined in a previous birth. When I think of Rāma not returning at the appointed time, I find even that is due to that same fate. My dear son! What have you decided to do? If you enter the fire, all the people of the famous land of Kōsala will also follow suit. All friendly kings and the leaders of our armies, too, will fall prey to this fire. Self-immolation will not stop with us who are your mothers! *Dharma, too, will plunge into the fire and be destroyed.* The world will be destabilised. Dear son! All your actions have been in conformity with justice, and never repugnant to dharma. You have not realised how precious you are! *Yugas may come and yugas may go, but your fame will go on for ever. Noble Bharata! Even if countless crores of Rāmas were to combine, can they come anywhere near your grace? You are the very embodiment of punyam, the result of virtuous deeds. If that life of yours were to go away, will the earth and heaven, together with their inhabitants ever survive?* Even if Rāma does not come back today, he will return tomorrow. Do not think that he will go against his promise of returning after the fourteen years of exile. If, however, he fails to keep his word, it only means that he must have faced the danger of death. *Dear Bharata! There is no dharma except you!* How can you conclude that Rāma is already dead and then indulge in undesirable actions, making the beings of this big world which should last till pralaya, perish prematurely? *O my son! Some may die, some may be separated and go apart, some may be reborn out of attachment (mōha), some others may consider it their duty to give up the thought of 'I' and 'Mine' and cast away attachment."*

Bharata replied, "When the truthful assertions of my father-like Rāma and our dynasty's actions are on the wane, I do not wish to live any longer. I shall keep my vow. Do not think that I (your son) have rejected your request. Am I also not the son of emperor Dasaratha who gave up his life to protect truth? *Should the duty of protecting truth be confined only to Rāma? Is it not the duty of others, too? Rāma might have considered it his duty to sacrifice love and affection and obey his parents. I will, however, not do so. I will prove my purity to Rāma by giving up my life."* Bharata, thereafter, approached the fire, while the multitude of people raised a clamour to prevent him from entering it. *As Bharata was offering worship to the fire,*

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the huge Hanuman arrived like a mountain. Addressing Bharata, Hanuman roared, "Our leader Rāma has returned. The Supreme Lord has come back. If you sacrifice your life which is the embodiment of truth, will Rāma sustain his life and live?" After extinguishing the fire and reducing it to black cinders with his hands, Hanuman paid obeisance to Bharata and said, "O my lord! Please listen to me. There are still forty *nāzhigais* left for the appointed time when Rāma must appear before you. If my words prove false, lowly cur as I am, I will fall into the fire even before you do, and end my life. Please believe my words and delay entering the fire till the bright sun rises in the east. By then Rāma will certainly arrive. If this is proved false, you and the world may perish. Sage Bharadwaja has arranged for a feast in honour of our Lord Rāma. The delay is only because he is resting in the sage's hermitage. Please listen to another good thing. Rāma has gracefully given me a token of identity, which I have brought with me to show to you. O lord with a flawless mind! Please look at this." Hanuman then showed Rāma's ring to Bharata.

To the people of the world and Bharata who had collected around the fire, the sight of the ring was like the nectar of immortality fed to those on the verge of death after consuming poison! The sobbing mouths of those gathered there now roared with pleasure. They clapped their hands in jubilation. The eyes that were shedding profuse tears, now became dry. The heads which were bent in agony, rose ecstatically. All hands offered worship to Hanuman. Bharata paid homage several times to Hanuman, the messenger, who had shown him Rāma's ring. Dancing in ecstasy, Bharata pressed the ring to his face. *His body swelled with joy, silencing those who had earlier doubted whether it could bear the weight of Rāma's love for him.* Ever since his separation from Rāma, Bharata was in sorrow. His body had become so light that it could be blown away by a mere breath! After seeing the ring, Bharata's body became robust, as if he were someone else! His sturdy shoulders rose like mountains. He wept, laughed and jumped ecstatically and prayed to Hanuman with the hands which received the ring. Suddenly he felt sorry. He swelled, sweated and danced with those present there and he clapped his mighty hands! Addressing those in front of him, he shouted, "Dance and run to Rāma to receive him, you `sinners'! Sing his glory! Place the feet of Hanuman, Rāma's special messenger, on your heads!" Slapping his own shoulders, he said, "Kaikeyi, the treacherous schemer will become depressed hereafter." He then swung round with his feet bent and danced like a black mountain. He worshipped the Védic scholars assembled there, saluted the kings surrounding him and the maids near him, saluted himself and stood like one who did not understand anything. *It could well be said that intense love was as intoxicating as liquor!*

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Bharata said to Hanuman, "Tell me who you are. You have come here in the guise of one who has mastered the scriptures, yet you resemble one of the three Supreme Lords. Please confirm it." Hanuman the wearer of resounding anklets replied, "O king! Belonging to the clan of monkeys, I hail from the womb of Anjana who did penance to obtain me. I am the slave of your unique brother, Rāma, doing his service. Transforming myself into a brahmin, I came here. Oh king! I am but a monkey! Please look with your lotus eyes at this humble body of mine which serves Rāma like a dog." Hanuman then gave up his human form, and grew very tall. His head was sighted by the Devas. Seeing the gigantic figure of Hanuman, Bharata holding a fierce bow, Satrughna, and Sage Vasishtha observed, "This is a mighty, flawless form never seen before." Though the armies standing near by did not die of fright, they were startled. Bharata then said to Hanuman, "Please reduce your boundless form, as our words will not reach your ears adorned with big ear-rings!"

Shrinking to his normal size, Hanuman made obeisance to Bharata. At Bharata's request, Hanuman narrating all that had happened after Rāma entered the forest, said, "Our Lord Rāma, after leaving Citrakootam, killed the mighty Rākshasa known as Virādha before reaching the Dandakā forest. The sages living there told Rāma that they had suspended their austerities because of the atrocities of the Rākshasās. Rāma asked the sages not to be perturbed and assured them of all help. After staying in Dandakāranyam for a decade, Rāma moved to the hermitage of the great Tamil sage, Agastya, who gave him a rousing welcome, and presented him with a bow and two quivers full of arrows, a suit of armour, and a sturdy sword. Later, along with Seeta and Lakshmana, Rāma met Jatāyu, the king of vultures, and proceeded to Pancavati. They spent many days there. A cruel Rākshasi known as Soorpanakha who happened to see Rāma, was fascinated by him and wanted to marry him. Thinking that Seeta was an impediment to her designs, Soorpanakha tried to abduct her. Comforting Seeta, Lakshmana severed Soorpanakha's nose and breasts. She went and reported everything to Khara, who had been appointed by Rāvana to guard the forest. Khara, Trisiras and the cruel Dooshana rose like the three raging fires and opposed Rāma with their armies. All of them perished like cotton in fire even before Rāma fed his bow with arrows! Soorpanakha reached Lanka and narrated the story of her humiliation to Rāvana, the possesser of twenty arms. Rāvana became furious. He sent an illusive deer to Seeta. When she desired this deer, Rāma followed it to catch it for her. As soon as Rāma was separated from Seeta, Rāvana, in the guise of a sage, lifted Seeta, the incarnation of Lakshmi, along with the earth, placed her in his chariot and took her to

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Lanka in the south. As Rāvana was carrying away Seeta, Jatāyu tried to save her, and in the fight, lost his life. Rāvana, then carried Seeta (who suffered intensely from the pangs of separation from Rāma) and imprisoned her in Lanka under a Simshupa tree in the Asōka grove amidst a crowd of Rākshasi guards.

"The great Rāma followed and killed the illusive deer which was actually the Rākshasa known as Mārica. Then along with Lakshmana, Rāma saw Jatāyu on the verge of death. Rāma proceeded southwards in pursuit of Seeta after performing the last rites for Jatāyu. In the mean time, a Rākshasa known as Kavandha who opposed Rāma was killed by him and released from a curse. Accepting the worship of Sabari who always thought of him, Rāma met Sugreeva on her advice. He then relieved the sufferings of Sugreeva caused by Vāli, by shooting an arrow that pierced Vāli's chest, and gracefully gave Vāli's wealth and kingdom to Sugreeva. After the rainy season, our leader Sugreeva, accompanied by several vānara leaders, met Rāma. A seventy vellam vānara army joined Sugreeva like a big sea. Sugreeva sent two vellam vānaras in each of the four directions to search for Seeta and return. Angada, the son of Vāli, with two vellam vānaras sped southwards. Prompted by Angada and Jāmbavan, I, a humble slave of Rāma, leapt from the Mahendra mountain, reached Lanka, saw Seeta there, ascertained all the details relating to her and came back. By then, the vast armies of Sugreeva reached the shores of the sea. In the mean time, Vibheeshana, the scholar among scholars and a brother of Rāvana, advised the latter to release Seeta and warned him that if he failed to do so, he would soon be killed. Spurned by Rāvana, Vibheeshana left Lanka and sought refuge at Rāma's divine feet. Rāma then called upon Varuna to appear before him. Varuna's delayed appearance made Rāma's lotus eyes turn red with fury. That very moment, the seven big seas and the body of Varuna became severely hot. Finally Varuna fell at Rāma's feet and sought his pardon. The victorious vānaras put up a Sétu across the sea through which the vānara army entered Lanka and made a din.

"Rāma shot arrows destroying Rāvana's twenty shoulders, his scar-ridden chest and his ten heads. Rāma's arrows also severed the shoulders and legs of Kumbhakarna Rāvana's brother, and destroyed the Rākshasa hordes. The 'invincible' Indrajit and several Rākshasās were killed by Lakshmana's arrows. The harassed Devas became jubilant and showered flowers on Rāma and Lakshmana. Then the flower-hued Rāma advised scholarly Vibheeshana to perform the last rites for all the Rākshasās who died in the battlefield. Rāma who showed his anger to Seeta for staying in the abode of another, got over it after Agni explained the greatness of Seeta's chastity to him. Rāma was worshipped by Lord Brahma, Lord Siva and the Devas. Emperor Dasaratha who

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had given up his life to uphold truth, arrived in a celestial chariot. Rāma, Lakshmana and the swan-like Seeta fell at Dasaratha's feet. Embracing Rāma and bathing him with tears, Dasaratha advised him to be graceful to the virtuous Seeta. Rāma pleaded, 'My graceful mother, Kaikeyi and her son, Bharata, should continue to be my mother and my brother.' Granting the boon, Dasaratha returned to heaven. Surrounded by Sugreeva, Vibheeshana, and the virtuous armies, and accompanied by Seeta, the greatest among women, Rāma and Lakshmana have since reached the hermitage of Sage Bharadwaja in the Pushpaka vimānam belonging to Vibheeshana of flawless glory. Because of Rāma's boundless love for you, he asked me to proceed quickly to you, show you his ring and relieve you of your mental agony."

After listening to Hanuman's tale, Bharata, shedding tears said, "One of the brothers, Lakshmana, followed Rāma who slew the Rākshasās in the city of Lanka surrounded by mighty walls. Whereas I, the other brother, remain here content with listening to all that happened. Wonderful indeed is my loyalty to Rāma!" Bharata felt sad and shed a stream of tears. After Bharata proceeded on foot and reached the banks of the Ganga (holding Hanuman's mighty red hands) the sun rose like a bright ruby as if to enable Devendra, the lord of the eastern region, to pick up the jewel and fix it on the crown of Rāma, to the delight of Mother Earth and Seeta the lotus dweller! Bharata, after his morning bath, offered worship to Rāma's sandals. Later, addressing Hanuman, Bharata said, "There seems to be something wrong in what you have said. Why is there no sound from Bharadwaja's hermitage which is just two yojanas from here? If Vibheeshana's vast army and the seventy vellam vānara army are all on their way here, there should have been a clamour like the roar of the sea. I should have at least heard the uproar of the vānarās from Bharadwaja's grove." Hanuman replied, "I am certain that the entire vānara army must have slept off after consuming too much of the honey and flowers provided by the sage. Owing to the boon granted by the Devas, honey, fruits, roots and vegetables are available in plenty and the troop of monkeys must have gone after them. Therefore, please do not be concerned. *In a moment your tearful eyes will see Rāma arriving."*

Sage Bharadwaja gave a feast with six varieties of dainty food to Rāma and his followers, who consumed them with pleasure. Guhan, too, with his vast army worshipped Rāma in his mind as well as with his shining eyes. Circumambulating him, he wept bitterly thinking of his long separation from him. When he prostrated himself at his divine feet, Rāma lifted and embraced him, as he would his brother. Then he asked Guhan, "I hope that your people and your wife are all doing well." Guhan replied, "Your grace is always with this humble man. My wife and my people

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are not so dear to me as you are. Life has been sweet indeed for this ignorant fellow who has not been fortunate enough to have followed you affectionately and served you like Lakshmana!" With these and other words, Guhan expressed his mental distress. Rāma told Guhan, "Why do you utter such words? Are you different from Bharata for me? I want you to remain in your place happily." Guhan then paid obeisance to Lakshmana and Seeta. Looking at Guhan, Rāma told Sugreeva and other friends, "He is the generous Guhan, the lord of the land on the banks of the River Ganga. He loves all beings more than a mother. He is the king of the flawless hunters." When the great and learned Rāma introduced Guhan thus, Sugreeva, and other friends, embraced him with joy and made friends with him. Meanwhile, the setting sun disappeared behind the big western mountain, plunging the world in darkness. Rāma completed his evening chores and rested along with Seeta while Lakshmana and the hunter Guhan, surrounded by a vast army, kept guard with devotion.

As soon as the sun rose the next day, Rāma worshipped Bharadwaja and took leave of him. *Then he proceeded towards Ayōdhya, accompanied by Lakshmana, Seeta and his victorious companions, followed by the mind of Bharadwaja. The celestial chariot sped through the sky without any impediment. After the golden ramparts of Ayōdhya (for which even Devendra's eternal capital looking like a living portrait was no match) were seen, Rāma announced the sighting of the shining city of Ayōdhya of immeasurable glory. Immediately, all stood up with folded hands and offered worship.* As though many suns had appeared simultaneously, the beautiful, golden, celestial chariot and Rāma the king of kings sitting in it, were seen from a distance by Hanuman. Looking at Bharata, Hanuman said, "The lotus-eyed Rāma, the vast vānara army, Seeta the most chaste jewel among women, and your younger brother, Lakshmana, with his lovely bow, are all coming. You can see them. Even after accommodating everyone from the fourteen worlds, the vimānam has space left in it. This celestial chariot is a unique one, flashing bright light everywhere. Rāma who will survive even the pralaya can be seen in it." *Like a cloud accompanied by lightning entering a cave in the golden Meru, Rāma appeared with Seeta in the celestial chariot.* The clamour of the people gathered to welcome their king, Rāma, spread far and wide, pervading even the southern city of Lanka, once ruled by Rāvana. Bharata, to whom Rāma was dearer than his own life, saw in him his truthful father, Dasaratha, who had reached heaven. Like one who gets back his belongings after losing them, Bharata became happy and was freed from his sufferings and pangs of separation, the moment he saw Rāma. Joyous Bharata who was holding Hanuman's hands, released his grip

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and offered worship to Rāma, even as Hanuman went towards the vimānam which was moving in the northerly direction. With great joy and a bosom drenched with tears of happiness, he saluted Rāma who was seated in the vimānam.

Hanuman looked at Rāma and said, "O lord, lowly cur as I am, I reached in time and informed the mighty-shouldered Bharata of your arrival when he was about to sacrifice his life by falling into the fire. Bharata gave up his bid for self- immolation, and saved the world." Rāma replied, "O truthful Hanuman! You have greater compassion than a mother! Several sins comitted by us in the past had remained with us causing repeated sufferings. Out of your love for us, you have wiped out all of them and spared us from our sorrow. This is our reward for the great penance done by us in our previous births." With his two mighty shoulders that resembled two mountains, Rāma held Hanuman in a tight embrace and added, "How can I adequately extol you (for the services you rendered without expecting anything in return), my father Dasaratha (who laid down his life for the sake of upholding truth), my brother Lakshmana (who accompanied me), and my mother Kausalya?"

Bharata's body had become weak and was almost invisible. He placed Rāma's sandals (which had been a great solace to him) over his head and stood near him with folded hands. Hanuman, who was a model of ancient dharma, looked at Bharata and paid obeisance to him. Pointing to him, Hanuman told Rāma, "Bharata ruled this kingdom without any attachment all these years. He even considered himself an enemy of his own mother." Looking at Bharata, Rāma experienced the same feeling he had experienced when he saw his father, who had come to see him in a vimānam. The celestial chariot carrying Rāma and others landed on the ground with a shower of flowers from the Devas including Devendra. *For all mothers, Rāma was like a calf that had returned after a long separation. For all those who had extricated themselves from their māya (illusion), his arrival was like communion with God! For his younger brothers, Bharata and Satrughna, he was like the moving eyeballs within the eyes. For everyone else, he was like the return of life to their bodies which had lost their lives due to sickness. He was like a mother to all those simple souls who had no opportunity to see him. He was like rare nectar to those who loved him. To the knowledgeable sages, he revealed in himself the true God! To women possessing beautiful eyes, he was like wine that intoxicated the mind!*

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Rāma was the very life of the land! When Rāma had left for the forest, men and women with beautiful eyes living in Ayōdhya and the fertile land of Kōsala had lost their happiness and lived in sorrow. *On Rāma's return from the forest, those unhappy souls regained their happiness and became lively, like a painted picture attaining life.* All the people in the land were overwhelmed with joy. A mixture of fragrant pollen dust, sandalwood, ghee, pearls from conches, flowers, oil, foam from the mouths of bridled horses, multi-coloured rutting fluid from countless elephants and tears of joy shed by musk-smeared women, flowed and went swiftly beyond the sea. As soon as the celestial chariot landed on the ground, the three mothers who had brought forth Rāma and his brothers, Sage Vasishtha and others boarded it. Rāma, the wearer of heroes' anklets, first prostrated himself at the divine feet of the precepter of his dynasty, Vasishtha. Raising Rāma to his feet, the sage blessed him heartily and embraced him affectionately freeing him from future agonies. Then Lakshmana paid his respects to Vasishtha by falling at his divine feet. The learned Vasishtha, blessed Lakshmana in the same manner he had blessed Rāma. Later, Rāma prostrated himself before Kaikeyi with his head touching her feet. Then he prostrated himself at the feet of Kausalya and Sumitra who in turn embraced him and bathed him with tears. The swan-like Seeta, too, paid her respects to Vasishtha and the others in the same order. The unique Lakshmana did likewise. *The three mothers later blessed Lakshmana and said that he alone was the real younger brother of Rāma.*

Bharata, offering his great love as well as the pair of sandals, to Rāma, prostrated himself at his feet. Rāma looked at Bharata and sobbed. Unable to speak, he finally embraced Bharata the way *life* and *body* embrace each other. Rāma again wept and broke down. The tears flowing from his lotus eyes, cleansed Bharata's dusty matted locks which had spoiled his youthful, handsome looks all these days. *Rāma was like a cow sniffing the head of her calf.* The bull-like Lakshmana, with his beautiful golden matted hair touching the ground, prostrated himself at the sacred feet of Bharata who handed over the galloping horses, elephants, chariots and other assets to Rāma along with his sandals. *On seeing Lakshmana and Bharata, everyone felt sad. They could not make out which of the two had become more emaciated, and wondered whether it was sad Lakshmana who (unable to live without him) had gone to the forest with Rāma, or Bharata who (separated from Rāma) lived in sorrow in the land of Kōsala! Weeping copiously, Bharata, with his long hands, lifted Lakshmana to his feet and embraced*

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him. Satrughna the youngest of the four, holding his hands clasped over his head, prostrated himself at Rāma's sacred feet and Lakshmana's anklet-adorned feet, and showered flowers on them. Satrughna also prostrated himself at the lotus feet of swan-like Seeta. With his robust shoulders, Rāma embraced Satrughna who had never left Bharata, and introduced Sugreeva and the others to his brothers. All of them paid homage to Bharata and Satrughna. Bharata, with his bosom adorned with a fragrant garland, stood welcoming and extolling Sugreeva the king of the vānaras, Angada, Kumudan, Jāmbavan, the ferocious Neelan and other leaders, and Vibheeshana, in an appropriate manner.

Sumantira and the other ministers, the army commanders and other leaders of the Kōsala land and various mighty kings ruling different countries, accompanied by their respective armies, came to see Rāma. Sumantira who stood up shedding profuse tears, with the conflicting emotions of sorrow and ecstasy raging within him, was embraced by Rāma, as well as Lakshmana. Sumantira then told Rāma, "Henceforth Mother Earth will not suffer." Rāma directed the armies to board the Pushpaka vimānam. Like the huge sea contained in the clouds, the large multitude of armies which boarded the vimānam were contained in it. They all paid their respects to Lakshmana who was standing inside. Seeing the vimānam, the Devas observed that neither the graceful belly of Lord Tirumāl who had earlier devoured all the worlds, nor the palm of Sage Agastya which had contained the entire ocean, could match this celestial chariot! The Devas gave it a jubilant ovation and showered a rain of flowers. *The sound of drums, the sound of the recitation of the Védas, the loud sound of conches, the sound of vocal music, the melodious sound of prayers, the sound of thunder and the roaring sound of the seven seas, spread rapidly beyond the eight regions and mingled with the sound of the loud greetings offered to Rāma from the sky by the Devas!*

38. THE CORONATION

Rāma reached the village of Nandi along with affectionate Bharata and his other brothers. After releasing his matted hair, Rāma bathed in cold water and was adorned fittingly, making even the Devas happy. To reach the city of Ayōdhya which was beautified with flags, Rāma, holding a fierce vél, left Nandi (which was in the south-western direction) in a gem-set chariot which resembled the sun and was drawn by white horses resembling the Supreme Védas! After reaching Ayōdhya, Rāma sat in

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a lofty everlasting golden chariot with Lakshmana (who was like a seven-cubit-tall elephant) holding the umbrella and the other mighty brother, Satrughna, waving the white chowry. Shedding tears of joy that brought down the dust, Bharata sat in the charioteer's seat. The great Vibheeshana and Sugreeva, seated on mountainous tuskers, flanked the chariot of Rāma who resembled a cloud. Angada wearing a crown of flowers, went ahead of the chariot, while Hanuman resembling Ādisesha followed it. Sixty-seven crore heroic and affable commanders of the vānara army in human form, occupying positions befitting their status, accompanied Rāma. Their chests were smeared with sandalwood paste. They sported flawless garlands, and rode elephants with royal white umbrellas spread over their heads. Adorned with shining crowns, kings of the seven circles of the earth belonging to eighteen divisions, owning elephants decorated with face-plates, chariots made of pure gold, round white umbrellas and white chowries, worshipped Rāma and surrounded him. The vānara women appearing in the guise of celestial women sat on blemishless female elephants, on horses wearing lustrous kinkini garlands and in palanquins, while the swan-like Seeta came in a shining flowery chariot. The whole world could be called a world of flowers due to the flowers showered continuously by the Devas and sages!

Lovely elephants had been dry and quiet all these fourteen years like a cluster of dry summer clouds. On Rāma's return, they became excited and began secreting rutting fluid which overflowed and broke all bounds. *Herds of horses wearing garlands set with tinkling bells raised a clamour as if the dumb had suddenly regained their power of speech, or the clouds had suddenly begun to thunder.* Trees flowered exquisitely as though the right season had suddenly arrived. The great Rāma to whom all the wealth now belonged, reached the city of Ayōdhya and saluted his mothers. Proceeding to the temple of Mahāvishnu, Rāma paid homage to the deity and to Sage Vasishtha, and witnessed Mother Earth and Goddess Lakshmi happily 'dancing' together. Men and women of Ayōdhya firmly held their attire and danced merrily, while their bodies swelled with excessive joy. Eager to see Rāma, victorious kings, in their excitement, wore the robes thrown away by dancing girls! Due to the intense jostling and mixing of the crowd, even those who had not smeared sandalwood paste, had a thick layer of it on their bodies! Rāma had remained for fourteen years in the forest giving up the wealth of the kingdom of Kōsala. During this period, the women of that land had been unhappy and had kept themselves away from their husbands. Now that Rāma had returned to Ayōdhya, these women wore attractive jewels and

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tried to captivate their men. *The fragrance of the celestials, mingling with the fragrance of the terrestrials, was a unique blend which aroused pangs of love that brought forth deep sighs from the women of the two worlds!*

Rāma, looking lovingly at Bharata, directed him to explain to the impeccable Vibheeshana, Sugreeva and the other vānaras the intricacies of the great palace. Bharata, after paying his respects to Rāma, left with his friends, crossed many halls and entered the central hall known as the 'Hall of the supreme', which resembled the Meru. Diamonds, rubies, sapphires and emeralds glittered inside the hall. Even the clear-headed Vibheeshana and others were dazed by them. They stood confounded without blinking their eyes and stared at the palace which shone brightly like the Kaustubham adorning Lord Tirumāl's bosom. Vibheeshana and the rest asked Bharata about the genesis of the palace. Bharata told them that Brahma had gifted it to the mighty-shouldered Ikshvāku (Rāma's ancestor) for the penance he had done. Declaring that the palace was great and laudable, Vibheeshana and the others showed their reverence to it with folded hands raised aloft. *Sugreeva bowed to Bharata and asked him, "O irreproachable one, why has a proper day not been fixed for tying the amulet on Rāma's hands preparatory to the coronation celebrations?" Bharata replied, "Water for the coronation from the seven seas and the rivers has yet to be brought. That is posing a problem." Sugreeva looked at Hanuman who took the cue and left at once, crossing the huge earth to bring the holy water.*

Bharata requested Sumantira to bring the astrologers along with Sage Vasishtha. When he arrived, all stood up and bowed at his feet with reverence. Resting on the seat offered by Bharata, Sage Vasishtha, in reply to a question from the former, said that the very next day was ideal for tying the amulet on Rāma. He added, "It is an auspicious day and will enable Rāma to rule the land pleasantly for a long period, along with the goddesses of earth and wealth. Scholars comparable to Brihaspati (Devendra's preceptor) and Vasishtha, sent messages to several kings informing them of the day and time when the beautiful lustrous crown would be placed on the head of *Dasaratha-Rāma*, over whom a moon-like lofty royal white umbrella would be held. After the enthusiastic messengers carried the news of the coronation to all the three worlds, everyone came to Ayōdhya. Even Lord Brahma could not assess their numerical strength! Sage Vasishtha, Bharata, Sugreeva, Vibheeshana, Jāmbavan, Angada and all other impeccable and exceptional heroes met Rāma, the conqueror of

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nger and jealousy. They told him that the coronation celebrations were fixed for the next day. Addressing bull-like Rāma, Vasishtha said, "Tomorrow is the ideal day for you to be crowned. Discharge the duties required for it." Thereafter, the unique sage resembling Lord Siva, left the place.

At the behest of Lord Brahma, the expert architect, Mayan, arrived in all humility, measured the site with a scale, removed all its flaws and put up a magnificent coronation hall, more priceless then the entire world. On the same day, Hanuman (who had once brought the mountain of herbs) flew as fast as his father Vāyu and brought the holy water from the seven seas. Holy water was also brought from River Sarayu by several kings in hundreds of gem-set pots carried on the backs of elephants to the accompaniment of the blare of trumpets and other instruments. A beautiful ruby-studded throne was made. The sturdy legs of the throne were made of diamonds and the sides were fitted with sheets of gold. The throne was then placed in the crystal hall. Rāma, wearing glittering ornaments, was seated on it along with Seeta. Accompanied by a shower of flowers, the Védas were recited, sacred hymns were sung, mighty conches were blown, cymbals and drums were sounded, and flawless musical instruments produced melodious tunes! Lord Rāma was bathed first by the Devas, and then by the great sages, Védic scholars, senior ministers and learned elders who had assembled there. They were followed by Sugreeva, Hanuman, Vibheeshana and the rest. In days of yore, Lord Brahma had bathed Lord Vishnu who had projected Himself into the Satyaloka, as Trivikrama. The water that flowed as the holy River Ganga was contained in the matted tuft of Lord Siva! *"Where will Lord Siva contain the water that now flows from the crowned head of leonine Rāma?" asked the assembled poets.* Rāma looked like an emerald mountain where a series of red lotuses had bloomed. Drenched by the water from River Ganga, Rāma was in the company of peacock-like Seeta with her vél-like eyes, and red ears adorned with ear-rings. All those who witnessed the extraordinary beauty of Rāma were relieved of the ailment of rebirth! Clear-headed Sumantira along with his ministers made arrangements for bringing all the exquisite materials fit for Devendra. As desired by the austere sages, Vasishtha completed the religious ceremonies.

Hanuman guarded the throne. Angada stood with the royal sword in his hand. Bharata held the royal white umbrella duly spread. Lakshmana and Satrughna waved the chowries. Seeta sat majestically by Rāma's side, and the ancestors of charitable

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Sadayappan of Tiruvennainallur (with whom the goddess of wealth was always present) gave the crown to Sage Vasishtha who crowned Rāma with it. On the appointed day and at the auspicious hour prescribed by Sukrācārya and Brihaspati, Rāma, the possessor of mighty arms which could embrace Goddess Lakshmi as well as divine earth, wore the crown on his head while the people of the three worlds gave him a joyful ovation. Even though it was on the head of Rāma that Vasishtha placed the lustrous crown, the excitement of the people of the three worlds made it appear as though it was each one of them that was crowned. Like a young woman who wants to get over her agony by embracing her husband (who had been away for some time and whom she had originally obtained after prolonged austerities), the huge land of Kōsala embraced Rāma, extending her lovely sprig-like arms. Directed by Vasishtha (the master of procedures), Rāma the giver of boons, crowned his brother Bharata as the crown-prince. Asking Bharata to wield the sceptre on his behalf, Rāma was steeped in boundless joy.

39. BIDDING FAREWELL

Inside a decorated dais put up with gem-set pillars and covered with gold, appearing like an ornament for Goddess Lakshmi, a diamond-studded palanquin was placed. Like a cloud and a streak of lightning, Rāma and Seeta arrived there. With a garland of pearls resembling lightning in the midst of a wide sea, and with a crown looking like the bright-rayed sun, Rāma the king of Ayōdhya, sat in the flower-bedecked palanquin. Like the moonlight spread on an emerald mountain, women with vél-like eyes, tender breasts and lustrous ear-rings were alternately waving white chowries standing on either side of Rāma. The inhabitants of the Nāga world, as well as the terrestrial and celestial worlds, sang songs of praise. Rāma's lustrous forehead (marked with vermilion), resembling the midday sun, spread its bright light all over the fourteen worlds, making the white moon in the sky appear pale. *Rāma's tall umbrella, as lofty as his own repute as a vanquisher of enemies, provided shade.* Auspicious hymns were sung. Learned men showered their blessings. Conches and drums blared and thundered while musical instruments poured forth music. Women with their red mouths, kayal-like black eyes and lotus faces, danced like peacocks. The gem-set crowns of kings spread boundless rays of light humbling even the sun. Every day, these mighty kings visited the palace (which resembled an emerald mountain) and went back after offering prayers and worship. Lord Rāma was surrounded by his senior ministers, scholars and army commanders, all of whom

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constantly extolled him. Women with coral-like mouths sang and blessed Rāma with a long life.

Accompanied by Mayindan, Tumindan, Kumban, Angada, Hanuman, Satavali, Kumudan, Dadimukhan, Gajamukhan, and seventy vellam vānara warriors and others, Sugreeva worshipped Rāma and surrounded him. Vibheeshana, along with his Rākshasās whose possessions were their swords and their pride, also surrounded Rāma after paying obeisance to him. The leader of the boatmen, the leonine Guhan, with a tiger's tail around his waist, with rolling eyes and diamond-like sturdy shoulders came along with his ferocious army, paid homage to Rāma, and approached him. *Showing his lotus face, the generous Rāma who possessed boundless love towards all those who came to him, made all of them happy as if he had embraced each one of them, and requested them to be seated.* Righteous people, scholars well-versed in the four Védas, knowledgeable ones who knew what to say, and virtuous and mature persons who had mastered the sacred texts, stood around Rāma, the king of kings. All the monarchs of this world as well as other worlds worshipped Rāma of Ayōdhya where Lakshmi stayed in the form of Seeta. Thus two months elapsed.

Rāma who held a sturdy bow and had Lakshmi in his bosom, gifted away pearls, gold, fertile lands and cows, to all the Védic scholars. He gave everyone whatever they wanted. He asked the kings wearing heroes' anklets to come near him, which they readily did. Looking at all of them with compassion, Rāma presented them with lands, palanquins, garlands, chains, crowns set with precious gems, golden ornaments, trimmed horses, sturdy chariots, elephants and exquisite apparel and sent them away. At the time of Rāma's birth, Devendra had given Dasaratha a lustrous gem-set shoulder ornament. Rāma gave Sugreeva this ornament as well as many mighty tuskers, chariots, herds of horses and fine clothes. To perpetuate the name 'Angada' throughout the land, Rāma, the flawless victor, gave Angada an ornament called *Angadam* (shoulder bracelet), which was originally presented by Lord Brahma to Ikshvāku. *The pride of Angada at that moment was beyond description.* After giving him more presents like a priceless pearl chain, fine silk clothes, horses and rutting elephants, Rāma blessed Angada and advised him to live happily and affectionately with Sugreeva.

Looking at Hanuman with immense joy, the glorious Rāma said, "Who could have

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helped me so greatly in those days, except you? What can I offer you in return? O sturdy-shouldered Hanuman, please embrace me." Feeling shy, Hanuman held his head down in reverence, closed his mouth and stood aside. Rāma looked at Hanuman and gave him diamond-studded jewels made of gold, necklaces, silken clothes, mighty elephants and horses. *Then Rāma looked compassionately at Seeta (whose words were like honey) who had come out of the lotus and appeared inside the golden-walled city of Mithila. Giving her a pearl necklace, Rāma asked her to present it to anyone of her choice. Understanding Rāma's meaningful look, Seeta accepted the necklace (made of big pearls that originally came from Goddess Saraswati) and happily gave it to Hanuman who had understood her sorrow and helped her.* Rāma, the incarnation of Mahāvishnu, gave Jāmbavan, the king of bears, a chain of pearls as bright as the moon and humbling the very stars, a gift that would do honour even to Devendra. Mighty elephants, horses, clothes, jewels and other valuables, too, were given to Jāmbavan. Rāma then gave affectionate Neelan, a chain comprising nine gems, beautiful silken clothes, unique golden ornaments, galloping horses adorned with garlands set with tinkling bells and irate elephants. To the heroic Satavali, Rāma gave steeds with golden garlands, mountain-like tuskers, beautiful chains set with gems and all the articles found in a home. Priceless lustrous ornaments set with gems, attractive clothes, three mighty rutting elephants and many horses were given to the vānara warrior, Kesari. Several other articles were given to Nalan, Kumudan, Tāran, the impeccable Panasan and others by Rāma the protector of Kōsala (abounding in fertile fields with fences of lotuses). Rāma thus gave gifts of different kinds, to sixty-seven crore vānara leaders. Extolling all of them with several pleasant words, Rāma blessed with his eyes the seventy vellam vānara warriors to live happily without any suffering.

Looking at the learned king Vibheeshana who wore a lustrous crown, Rāma said, *"There are none in this world as tranquil as you are. Even if there are any, they can only be like iron, while you are like gold."* Rāma gave him the gem-set bracelets (given to him by the Devas), rare and mighty elephants, chariots, horses, golden ornaments studded with gems, silk-laced clothes, fragrant scents, and fresh soft, sandalwood paste. Rāma looked at Guhan standing near by and said, "You have been a flawless companion to me. What is there for me to tell you?" And then Rāma gave Guhan, mighty elephants, horses, gold, clothes and precious ornaments. Rāma, the ocean of grace, looked at Hanuman, Angada and Sugreeva and said, *"The very thought of asking you all to leave, is inconceivable. But then, your land must be protected by you.*

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Therefore go back to your land." To Vibheeshana also, Rāma spoke similar words and bade him farewell. The knowledgeable Sugreeva, Guhan and Vibheeshana were unwilling to leave Rāma. They however, got over their depression and decided that it was their duty to carry out the commands of Rāma. They went round Bharata, Lakshmana, Satrughna, the noble and austere Sage Vasishtha, the three mothers, Seeta, and Rāma the giver of boons, and took their leave. The great and affectionate Vibheeshana, wearing the garland of victory took everyone in his celestial chariot. On the way, he left Guhan at Sringaberam and Sugreeva at Kishkinda. Later, proceeding through the sky, along with his sharp-toothed Rākshasās, that same day Vibheeshana entered the city of Lanka surrounded by the roaring sea.

The Supreme Lord Rāma, assisted by his brothers, reigned over his sovereign land in accordance with the laws of Manu and protected the world and dharma in such a manner that Mother Earth and Goddess Lakshmi were not in the least hurt. The charitable Rāma who had come to Ayōdhya after abandoning His 'sleep' from the ocean of milk, was worshipped, and acclaimed in the fourteen worlds!

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THE RĀMĀYANA IN INDIAN LANGUAGES

(We have tried to compile as complete a list of all the major works based on the Epic as we could. If you know of any work that we have missed out, please inform us.)

SANSKRIT

1. Vālmiki Rāmāyana
2. Yōga Vasishtha Rāmāyana
3. Adhyātma Rāmāyana
4. Adbhuta Rāmāyana
5. Ānanda Rāmāyana
6. Bhushundi Rāmāyana

ASSAMESE

7. Rāmāyana by Mādhava Kandali
8. Rāmāyana by Ananta Kandali
9. Gīti Rāmāyana by Durgavara Kāyastha
10. Rāmāyana Chandrika by Kalapachandra Dvija
11. Rāmāyana by Raghunatha Mahanta

BENGALI

12. Krittivasa Rāmāyana
13. Rāmāyana by Mādhava Kandali
14. Rāmāyana by Adbhutāchārya
15. Rāmāyana by Chandravati
16. Rāmāyana by Kavichandra
17. Rāmāyana by Rāmānanda Ghosh
18. Rāmāyana by Jagatram

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GUJARATI

19. Giridhara Rāmāyana or Rāmacharitra
20. Rāmāyana by Nakar
21. Rāmāyana by Kohan
22. Rāmāyana by Vishudas
23. Rāmalīla by Bhīma
24. Rāmayajña by Premānanda
25. Rāmāyanasāra by Narmada

HINDI

26. Rāmcharit Mānas by Tulasidās
27. Soora Rāmāyana by Surdās
28. Rāmachandrika by Keshava Dās
29. Pauma Carin - in Apabhramsa by Swayambhūdeva
30. Sāketa Mahākāvya - by Maithili Sharan Gupta

KANNADA

31. Torave Rāmāyana by Narahari
32. Kaushika Rāmāyana by Batteleswara
33. Chamarajoktinilasa by Virupaksha
34. Sri Rāmapattabhisheka by Dr. Masti Venkatesh Iyengar
35. Sri Rāmāyana Darshana by Kuvempu
36. Rāmāsvamedha by Muddana

KASHMIRI

37. Shankara Rāmāyana
38. Prakāsha Rāmāyana

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39. Vishnu Pratāpa Rāmāyana
40. Sharma Rāmāyana
41. Tārāchanda Rāmāyana
42. Amarnāth Rāmāyana
43. Ānanda Rām Rāmāyana

MANIPURI

44. Manipurī Rāmāyana by Angom Gopi
45. Rām Nongaba by Lamanyo Sing Konthonjamba

MALAYALAM

46. Rāmacharitam by Ceraman
47. Adhyātma Rāmāyanam by Ezhuttacchan
48. Kannassa Rāmāyanam by Rāma Panikkara
49. Rāmakathāppattu by Ayyippilla Asan
50. Vālmiki Rāmāyanam by Keralavarma Raja
51. Rāmāyana Prabandham by M.N. Bhattatiri
52. Rāmāyanam Champu by Punam Namputiri

ODISSI

53. Jagmohan Rāmāyana by Balaram Das
54. Rāmakathā by Sarala Das
55. Rāma Vibhā by Arjun Das
56. Tīka Rāmāyana by Maheswara Das
57. Vilankā Rāmāyana by Siddheswara Das
58. Adhyātma Rāmāyana by Haladhara Das
59. Vālmiki Rāmāyana by K.C. Patnaik

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60. Rāmāyana Sāgara by Sitachandra Das

61. Srī Rāma Vibāsa by Dananjaya Bhanja

PUNJABI

62. Rāmāvatāra by Guru Gobinda Singh

63. Vālmiki Rāmāyana by A.N. Chopra

64. Vālmiki Rāmāyana by B.L. Shastri

65. Tulsī Rāmāyana - G.S. Sinsh

TAMIL

66. Kamba Rāmāyana by Kavicakravarti Kamban

TELUGU

67. Ranganatha Rāmāyana by G.B. Reddi

68. Bhaskara Rāmāyana

69. Ketta Varadaraju Rāmāyana by K.V. Raju

70. Molla Rāmāyana by Molla

71. Rāmāyana by Thimmakavi

72. Rāmābhyudayam by Ramabhadran

73. Rāmāyana by Erranna

74. Rāmāyana by K. Satyanarayana

75. Rāmāyana by Ananthakavi

76. Rāmāyana by K.P. Raju

77. Rāmāyana by G.V. Kavi

78. Āndhra Vālmiki Rāmāyana by V. Subba Rao

79. Rāmāyana Kalpavrikshanam by V. Satyanarayana

80. Uttara Rāmāyana by Tikkana

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THE RĀMĀYANA IN OTHER ASIAN LANGUAGES

MYANMAR

(A) Prose

1. Rāma Vatthu (17th c)
2. Mahā Rāma (18th c)
3. Rāma Thonmyo
   by Saya Htwe (1904)

(B) Poetry

4. Rāma Thagyin
   by U Aung Phyo 91775)
5. Rāma Yagan
   by U Toe (1784)
6. Alaung Rāma Thagyin
   by Saya Htun of Akyab (1905)

(C) Drama

7. Thiri Rāma
   by Nemyo Nataka Kyaw Gaung (18th c)
8. Pontaw Rāma
   by Saya Ku (1880)
9. Pontaw Rāma and Lakkhana
   by U Maung Gyi (1910)

JAPAN

Abridged version of Rāmāyana in Hobutsusha (Ratna- Sangrahe)

NEPAL

1. Mero Rāma
2. Ādarsha Rāghavan Mahākāvya
   (Modern Nepali Rāmāyana)

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3. Ādi Rāmāyana (Translation)

4. Rāmāyana (Nepali)
by Acharya Bhaubhakta

5. Rāmāshvamedha

6. Adhyātma Rāmāyana

8. Ātma - Rāmāyana

THAILAND

Rāmakein or Rāmakīrti

MALAYSIA

Cerita Seri Rāma

Hikayat Seri Rāma

Cerita Mahraja Wana (The tale of Mahārāja Rāvana)

LOAS

Lao Rāmāyana - Pha La Phalam

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R.K. Sharma (1993)

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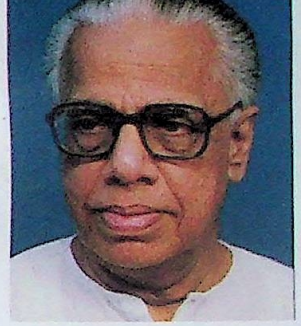

Dr H V HANDE, born in Coimbatore on 28th November 1927, is a medical practitioner who has been practising since 1950 at Shenoy Nagar in Chennai.

Dr Hande entered politics in 1942, when, as a college student, he participated in the Quit India Movement. His political mentor from 1965 onwards was the renowned statesman, C Rajagopalachari (Rajaji).

Dr Hande was elected to the Tamil Nadu Legislature for five terms. He was the Minister for Health in M G R's Cabinet in 1980 and again in 1984. He received the B C Roy Award in 1985 for his excellent work in the field of Health.

Dr Hande, who is fluent in several languages including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and English, always took up the cudgels on behalf of the underdog. For this, he is held in high esteem all over Tamil Nadu; and for his powers of oratory, and excellent debating and organizational skills, he has won accolades from such illustrious personages as Rajaji, Kamaraj, Anna, M G R and Karunanidhi.

Dr Hande's English rendering of the Tamil epic reveals his deep knowledge of Tamil culture and his good command of Tamil and English. This major work is the result of over eight years of devoted labour.

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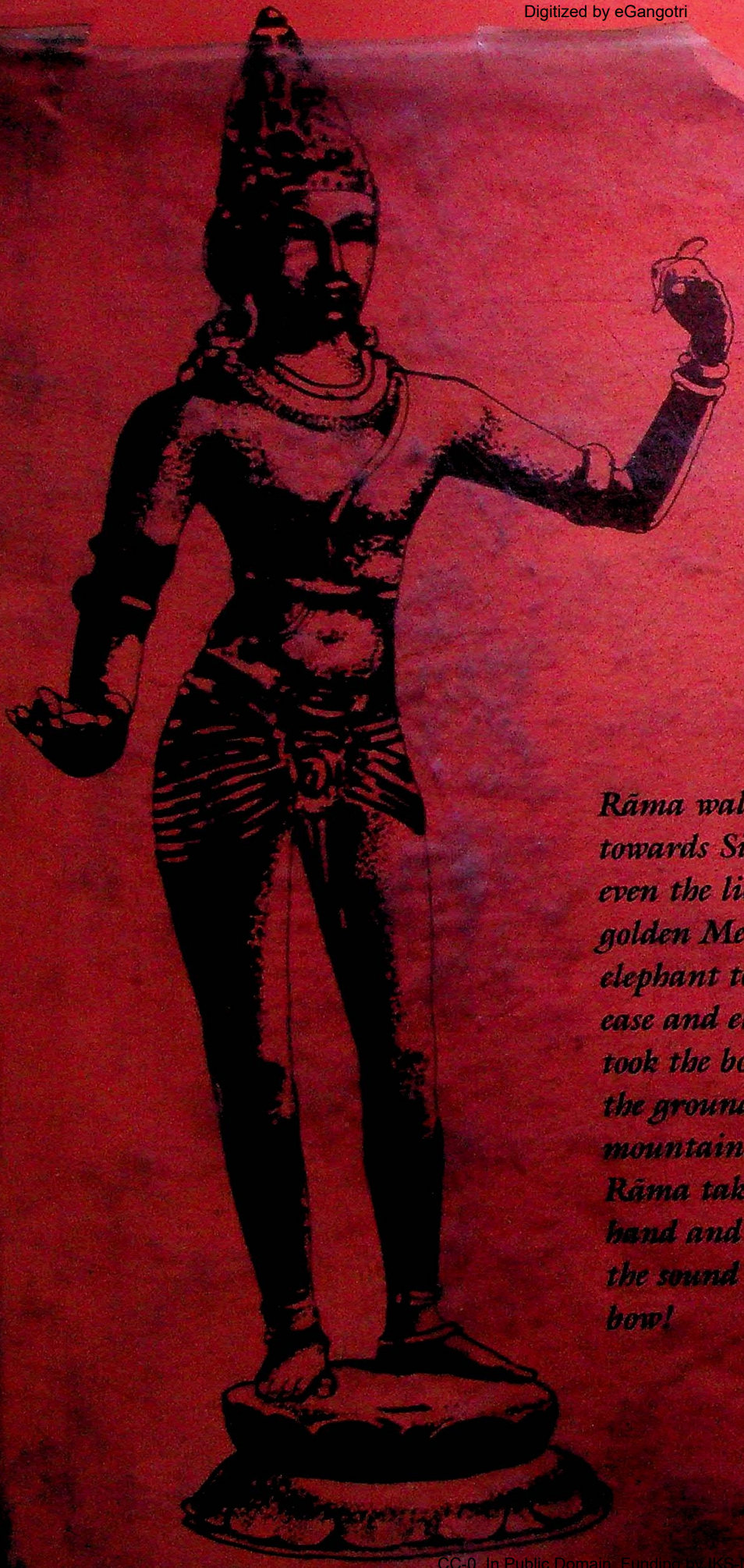

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Rāma walked majestically towards Siva's bow, putting even the lion, the bull, the golden Meru, and the elephant to shame. With ease and elegance, Rāma took the bow which lay on the ground like a big golden mountain... They just saw Rāma taking the bow in his hand and instantly heard the sound of the breaking bow!

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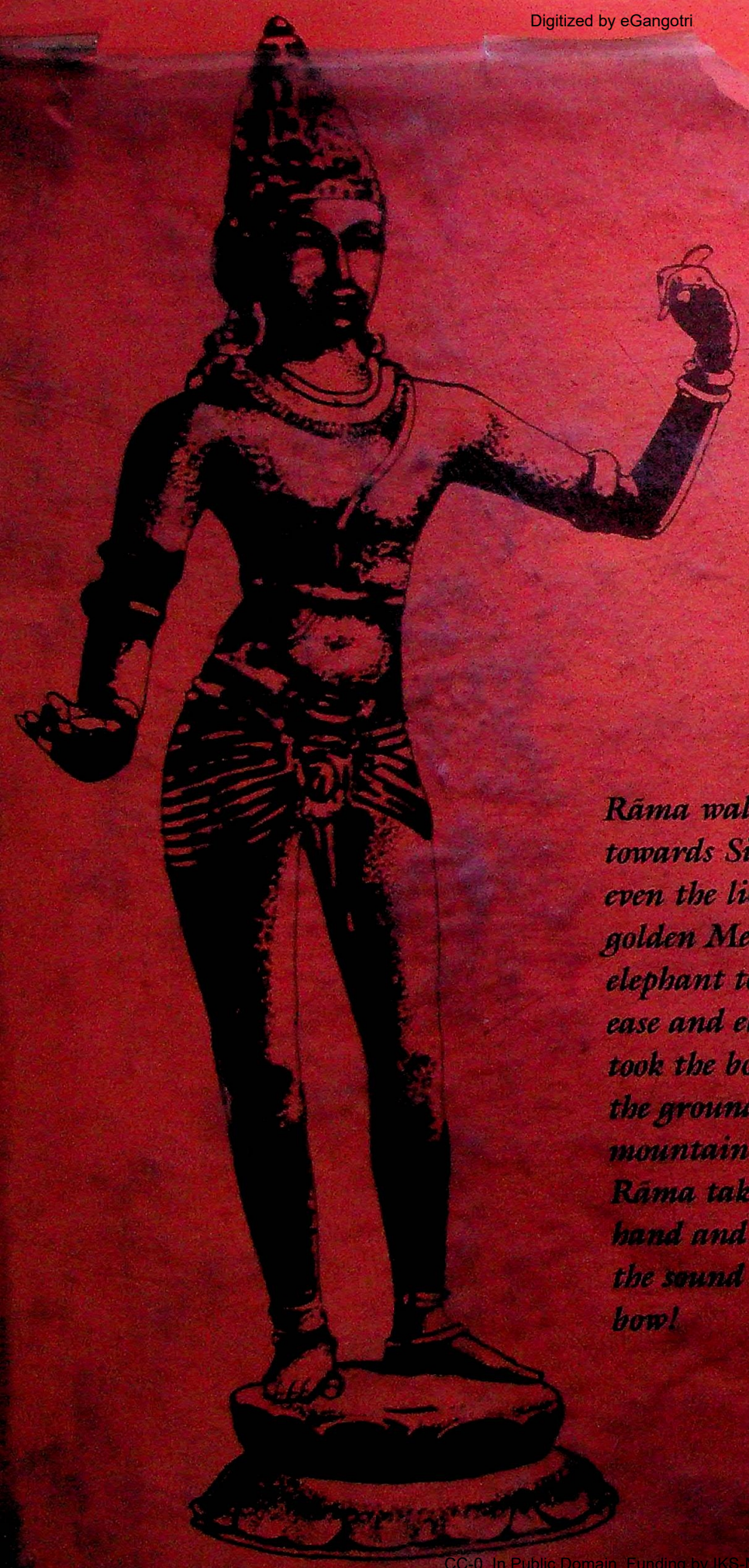

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